

SOUTH AFRICA'S LEADING GAMING, COMPUTER & TECHNOLOGY MAGAZINE

NAG

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- CALL OF DUTY 5 PREVIEWED
- BATTLEFIELD: BAD COMPANY REVIEWED
- GTA IV STRATEGY GUIDE
- COMMODORE IS BACK...

FARCRY 2

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GUN BUT RATHER A
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07





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(66383)
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Play Play Play...

Meet Miss July

MERCEDES PARELLADA



Age: 26

Occupation: Bus driver

Lives: Amsterdam

What kind of men do you like?

I love soldiers. I love men in uniform carrying big guns, it's so hot. There is something about how they are so put together which makes me want to get them all dirty.

Any hobbies?

Gold, I love gold. Gold jewellery, gold forks, gold miniature dogs, gold anything. I need a man who's loaded to fulfill my golden fantasies. There are so many gold things I want, like my underwear made of gold.

What's your favourite book?

I'm reading a book called, *Lonely Soldier*. It's about a soldier who falls in love with a stripper from another country while at war. Her family won't let him see her because of the war.

What is a turn on?

Explosions. I love it. It's just pure power. I don't like blowing things up. But I love watching a man do it. It's so hot, it's like he's saying to me, "BAM, I will destroy you lady with my explosive love." It drives me crazy.

What are turn offs?

Men who don't blow stuff up.

What are your plans for the future?

I'd love to enlist in the army. People tell me I have a sweet voice and I think I'd be a great dispatch girl. And I could meet lots of manly soldiers and see nice explosions.

Full pictorial in next
month's issue of B.C.



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DICE

PLAYSTATION 3



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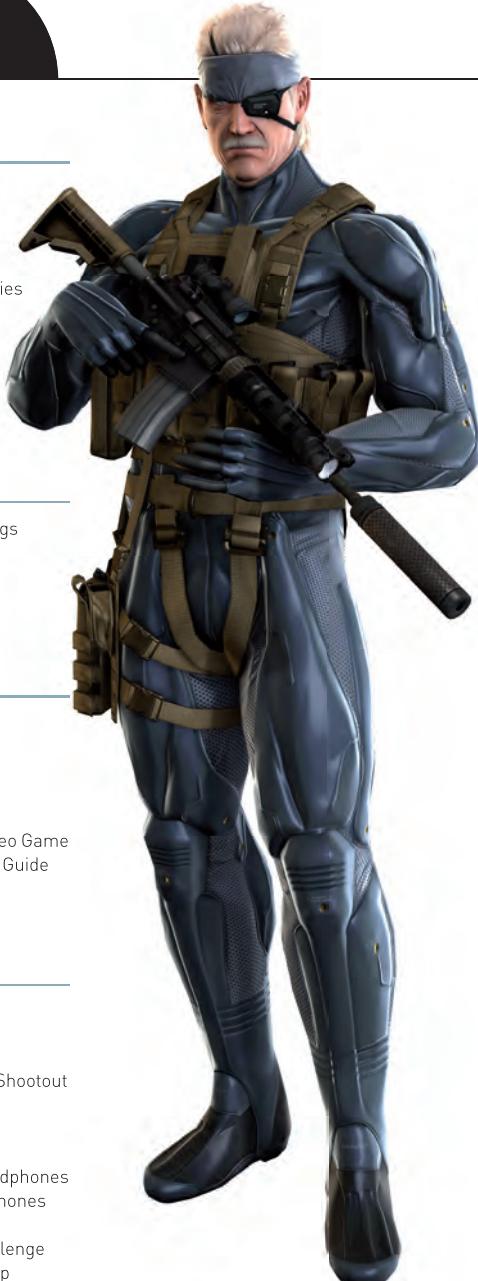
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- Engine of War | Heresy War



DRIVERS

- ATI Catalyst 8.5 (Windows XP) | NVIDIA ForceWare 175.16 (Windows XP)

FREE GAMES

- Celestial Impact | Postal 2: Share The Pain

MODIFICATIONS

- Call of Duty 4: PeZBOT | Oblivion: Martigen's Monster Mod [v3.0] | Oblivion: Oscuro's Oblivion Overhaul [v1.3] | Unreal Tournament III: Liandri Bots

PATCHES / UPDATES

- Assassin's Creed [v1.02] | Battlefield 2142 [v1.4 - v1.5] | Call of Duty 4 [v1.6] | ETWQ [v1.5] | Frontlines: Fuel of War [v1.1.0] | PlayStation 3 Firmware [v2.35] | PlayStation Portable Firmware [v3.90] | Sins of a Solar Empire [v1.05] | Rainbow Six: Vegas 2 [v1.02] | Windows Vista Service Pack 1 [x86], Windows XP Service Pack 3 [x86] | World in Conflict [v1.008]

UTILITIES

- DExposE2 Reloaded | Lebendig | Magic120Cell | OtaClock | UltimateDefrag

VIDEOS

- Trailers:** Aces of Galaxy | Alone in the Dark | Baja | Battlefield: Bad Company | Bourne Conspiracy | City Life: Nightlife | Collapse | Dungeon Party | EndWar | Facebreaker | Fracture | Golden Axe: Beast Rider | GRID | Eternal Silence | King's Bounty: The Legend | Left 4 Dead | Lost Winds | Majesty 2 | Ninja Gaiden II | Resident Evil 5 | Sims Carnival | Spore | Thesis | Venetica | Zoids Assault

- Extra:** Command & Conquer: Command School | GameTrailers.com Retrospectives [Final Fantasy, Jak & Daxter, Mario Kart, Metal Gear, Metroid, Prince of Persia, Silent Hill, Zelda], ScrewAttack.com: Videogame Vault | Ubidays Paris 2008





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NO TIME...

THE LAST THREE MONTHS have been busy. Things always get tense towards the end of the year thanks to rAge and all the big games arriving towards Christmas. That's right, next month is July already folks. The good news is that we're over the hump issue now and it's downhill from here... in more ways than one. At this point, I should probably just say sorry to all those people who are still waiting for proposals, letters, replies, and phone calls from me. I'll get there eventually, unless something interesting arrives on my desk.

Okay, that's really all from me this month. I know it's short and not really worth the read, but I have lots of housekeeping things to talk about this month starting with...

GOODBYE TO MIKTAR

This issue is historic in that we bid a sad farewell to Miktar who is leaving on a jet plane to the United States of America. He'll still be writing for us and doing the cover DVD, but more importantly, attending all those gaming events and special launches we usually have to pass by thanks to deadline timing and economy class. Goodbye and see you soon. I wasn't really sure what to write here about you after all these years, and I had to try really hard to squeeze out a few tears - they lay in glistening pools on my spacebar and D and B keys. I wasn't sure what that meant, but I didn't wipe them away, I left them to dry. :) Anyway, good times and all that and I really hope whatever you're looking for comes to find you, but not in a dark alley bad kind of way; and from the rest of us South Africans, don't let the door...

RAGE 2008!

We stuck a rAge teaser advert in this issue just announcing the dates. Next month things get a lot more interesting - can you say NAG LAN, gaming, booth babes, hardware and all the rest of the marketing hype we plug to get you to attend the biggest gaming show in South Africa. In more news, we're going to the Dome soon to investigate some interesting options for expanding the LAN area. For now, we're currently on 1,800 seats and the tickets will go on sale on 1 August 2008. Start planning and saving for your tickets because they're usually all sold out in about three weeks and we won't have any more.

NAG WAS HIRING...

We're done with the whole *NAG* is hiring process and the 'winners' are Dane Remendes and Geoff Burrows. Dane started writing for this issue already, so I'm sure everyone who sent in a submission will be all over his writing looking for mistakes and justifications as to why they can write better and he sucks. You can send your mails to the usual address. The point: you can stop sending in submissions - we're done. I asked him to write 200 words for this page so that you can see what he's all about. My criticism: I thought he played it safe with a little self depreciation, went a little crazy with all the rival gang stuff - because I don't remember any of that happening - and then wrapped it up like a fanboy. It was also exactly 200 words long, which is a good thing. We really threw him in at the deep end and he's still floating, so that's a good sign. Geoff will only start at the beginning of July.

TRACKMANIA COMPETITION

We've received many entries for this competition, but they're mostly rubbish so we're extending the deadline to 1 August 2008. Come on people, put a little effort in.

Okay, I'm all done. See you in August...

Michael James
Editor

NAG REVIEW RIGS SUPPLIED BY:

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MY FIRST WEEK AT NAG

You may find it odd that I left a job working as a developer/programmer for a software company to write for *NAG*. Let me explain. A while back I came across a 'NAG is hiring' ad, and on impulse decided to apply. I'm not sure if it was pure luck or writing skill (I'm going to go with luck), but one thing led to another and here I am, writing this. It's been a strange first week for me, since it's a deadline week and everyone has been too busy for me to get to know my new colleagues and the workplace as well as I'd like. Moreover, the shootout between rival gangs that happened outside the office on my third day here still has me shaken up (they were arguing over which gang was more Alpha, when the situation suddenly exploded), so I don't have much to say. One thing is certain though: it's only my first week and I already feel that I couldn't have made a better decision to leave programming and start here, because let's get one thing straight - this is not just any magazine. This is *NAG*. Need I say more?

Dane Remendes



COVER STORY

Thanks to some hands-on time in Paris with *Far Cry 2*, the feature grew to a massive ten pages. The reason why we went with a gatefold (six-page cover) this issue was for dramatic effect. It's an impressive game and deserves all the attention. Thanks to Ubisoft and Megarom for throwing money at us to make it all happen.



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King Mswati III

miktar dracon
miktar.dragon@tidemedia.co.za

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regardt van der berg

Ken Themba

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Idi Amin

alex jelagin

Charles Taylor

dane remendes

P.W. Botha

nati de jager

Child soldiers

clive burmeister
geoff burrows
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Two carrots were crossing the road. One was ran over by a car. After taking the injured carrot to the hospital the doctor says, "Well the good news is that your friend is going to live, but the bad news is he's going to be a vegetable for the rest of his life."



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LETTER OF THE MOMENT**From:** Kobus**Subject:** Next generation consoles.

Impact: positive or negative?

“EVERY TIME I BUY a new NAG, most of the reviews and previews of the games are for the next generation consoles. My question, the PS2 and PC, are they going to die? Yes there are some good new titles for the PC, but with companies only making games for the Xbox 360 and PS3, the life of the older consoles is very short! There are a lot of dedicated gamers out there who don't have the money to buy themselves a new console, and now their trusty old PS2 doesn't get any new games because of the new consoles. What is your opinion on this? I made it short and sweet for you."

My opinion: why do people care what I think? Okay, since you're twisting my arm, I'll give you my brief opinion. As time marches on, old things die and are forgotten, to be replaced by new things. This is a universal cycle and only the concept of time differentiates between the life cycle of a fruit fly and the life cycle of a galaxy [imagine space opera music here]. The point, in a thousand years nobody's going to care or even remember what a gaming console was. The beings living a thousand years from now will shake their heads in disbelief and amazement that they ever managed to evolve past the primitive slugs we are now. Ed.

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The 'Letter of the Moment' prize is sponsored by Megarom. The winner receives two games for coming up with the most eclectic chicken scratch.

IMPORTANT STUFF! PAY ATTENTION!**Land Mail:** P.O. Box 237, Olivedale, 2158**Cyber mail:** letters@idimedia.co.za

Important: Include your details when mailing us, otherwise how will you ever get your prize if you win...

**From:** Ryno**Subject:** PC Gaming is the best

“MY NAME IS [SEE above] and I'm 15 years old and I love gaming, from the start and will forever. My friends and I used to LAN a lot in the days when my PC was still up-to-date. I've bought an Xbox 360 thinking that it would make me feel better but nothing compares to PC gaming, I realise that now. I'm trying to start a new PC and I'm putting all my money into it. Please NAG I'm asking from my heart, if you have any old or spare parts that I can start building my PC on. I'll be using it to keep PC gaming alive!"

What do you call déjà vu that keeps repeating on you like last night's bean and banana stew? I'll tell you. NAG readers who beg for free stuff. As much as we'd like to help all the gaming hobos out there, the plain and simple truth is that we're selfish and don't really care. So, here's a plan. Instead of begging, start working. Since you're still young and hopefully not too fat and lazy by now, why don't you start washing cars down at the local shopping centre? If you wash 50 cars a day at R10 a car, you're looking at a clean and tax-free R1,000 over the weekend, and in 20 weekends you'll be able to buy the kind of PC only hard work gets you. Ed.

Subject: Typo in June Issue of NAG**From:** DRKD3VIL

“I'VE RECENTLY BOUGHT THE "June Giblet Jamboree" edition of NAG, and I was paging through my favourite... and the only magazine I buy... and was very surprised to see that you guys have a typo LOL! Yeah! On Page 25... there is "THIS DAY IN GAMING: MAY" but... ahem it's the June issue..."

You only found the one! Phew. Ed.

Subject: People bitching**From:** Eric

“WHILE STANDING AROUND THE water cooler, having a smoke in the bathroom or just standing in a line you can hear them from afar. Someone will be exclaiming at the top of their lungs that, "I can't believe that [insert website or magazine name here] gave [insert game name here] such a low/high score." You know

who I'm talking about, the guy who plays games on a weekend knows better than someone who is paid to review games for a living. The kind of person who when you are around irritates me to the point where I want to punch them in the mouth just to get them to shut-up. It's just the reviewers' opinion, he/she will give valid reasons as to why they feel this way and describe the game so that you can make a valid well concluded decision on whether or not to purchase the game. If your opinion does not coincide with that of the reviewer keep your opinion to yourself and just enjoy/ boycott the game."

Between you and me, they [the other people] are actually spot on. We really don't know what we're doing here at this company. I ended up here by accident and all because I wanted to get free games to play. All the freelancers were more or less in the right place at the right time, and I can't even remember how Adam ended up working as a freelancer for NAG. Miktar essentially just wandered in off the street and didn't ever leave. If I think about it, only one or two people in the office were ever actually hired to do a proper job here and they handle stuff like sales and administration. NAG is a lot like an abandoned old office block; stray cats just keep arriving and staying until someone decides to notify the authorities. Ed.

Subject: Quantity over quality?**From:** That Guy

“I'M GOING TO GET straight to the point with this letter. I know that you only have limited space in your magazine (about 136 pages) but I really feel like you've gone for quantity over quality. You have crammed everything into your magazine, meaning that you don't have enough info when you review games. Maybe you think you have enough info in your reviews, but half a page is not long enough for a review, even if it's a bad game. In some cases, you've even dared to pack three reviews onto one page! I am a supporter of [other magazine]. In the June issue, you reviewed MGS: PO+ on one third of a page. [Other magazine] reviewed it on one whole page. This means that they had three times more info than you had. I think you really need to rethink the layout of your magazine. I don't want bite-sized pieces, I want the whole meal. Other than that, I think your magazine is really cool and I would like to thank you for cramming lots of things onto your cover disk, but please don't cram things into your magazine. Maybe you can come up with a suggestion, like take out some of the unimportant things that aren't related to gaming and hardware. After all, you are "South Africa's leading gaming and technology magazine," not "South Africa's leading gaming and technology magazine, with lots of other irrelevant stuff in it as well."

I wish I knew what to do about having too much information and not enough space in the magazine. I personally prefer plenty of information on a single game, but then we'd have to cut out half the games we usually put in. What we try to do is go with majority rules. For example, in this issue, Far Cry 2 gets ten pages of sweet gentle loving and is a game that many thousands of gamers are dying to play - so we go big. MGS: PO+ is a game only hundreds of gamers want to play, and the Xbox 360, PS3 and PC platforms outsell the PSP by plenty to one. So, we're more or less compelled to give the bigger games all the space and leave the smaller ones to fight for the scraps. Yes, I know, it isn't fair, but this is just how it is. In my ideal world I'd love to have a 300-page magazine with everything under the sun in it, but... Ed.

Subject: GTA**From:** Jason

“I COULDN'T BELIEVE THAT NAG reviewed GTA IV on the XBOX 360, when we all know that that Grand Theft Auto became a huge success on the PlayStation in the first place, and where it made it's real name and status as one of the greatest titles in history... you missed a trick there... you guys suck!"

Thanks for the kind words. The facts, however: we never received a copy of the game [still haven't actually] for the PlayStation 3, only the Xbox 360. So send your fan mail to PlayStation not us. Besides, what difference does it make anyway. I thought we were all past this whole my console sucks less than yours idiocy. Ed.

THIS WILL ONLY END IN TRAGEDY
NEVER SEPARATE A GAMER AND HIS NAG



NAG FAN ARTWORK

A while back [May], we asked people to send in NAG Fan artwork. The winner this month is Brian Fincham who added some insight on his creation: "This is a little 3D I did in 3D Studio Max and Photoshop. It's a depiction of a character pulling his addicted buddy away from a beautiful issue of NAG. Obviously, a big mistake."

Subject: Violence in Games

From: FH

SOUTH AFRICA. WHAT A beautiful place. But, unfortunately, like most diamonds in the world, it does have its flaws, such as Telkom, Eskom, aggressive drivers on the roads, crime levels etc. The question one asks now is: How can the flaws of South Africa have anything to do with gaming? [I was wondering the very same thing, Ed]

There have been a few studies about gaming that concern games improving the reflexes of gamers. There have also been reports that suggest that violent games specifically improve the coherent thinking of people experiencing the "flight or fight" or "run or gun" instinct, since in violent games you are most of the time either fighting enemies or running away from them. To make it simple, humans are mammals and mammals have an instinct that kicks in when the mammal is faced with mortal danger. The instinct is to either fight to the death or run away but the human's body is flooded with adrenaline in that state, which makes it difficult to think coherently and rationally in such a state. Basically, some reports suggest that gaming can make people think more rationally while still in the "fight or flight" adrenal state. Now, to bring South Africa's flaws and gaming together: In South Africa, there is a lot of crime, there's no point in arguing that. A lot of people are murdered each day and the truth is; you could be next. For example, in a house robbery [since house robbers these days seem to be intent on killing, not just robbing] having an extra few seconds to get your gun or your family to safety can save your life. But in that kind of situation, it's really difficult to think coherently [I have some very unwanted experience in this matter]. But if those reports are true, and playing violent games can give you that few extra seconds, I think violent gaming actually has a real use in South Africa, or other countries where crime is a big problem, as they can act more as a training simulator for when you really need it and chances are in South Africa you will need it. [Cut for length, Ed.]

[And then continues, Ed.] "I admit, it requires some out-of-the-box thinking for this to make sense but if you are a citizen of South Africa and know the dangerous reality of crime and the high frequency of horrible car accidents, it will be easy to relate to the idea of violent gaming having a constructive use."

I don't agree. It takes some real out-of-the-tree thinking to cook up this load of rubbish. Your argument is based on using gaming practice to 'manage' the adrenaline-fuelled fight-or-flight survival mechanism built into the human animal! The flaw is that no game in this decade or even the next is ever going to spark the same kind of reaction you're going to get when confronted with an angry lion in a confined space or a knife-wielding murderer. If you've ever actually had a life or death experience, you'll know the difference. I know, do yourself a favour one day and bungee jump off a bridge – you don't get that sensation playing games unless you're mentally unhinged. Nice idea though – just not in this phase of reality. Ed. NAG

ON THE FORUM

QUESTION: Which of the upcoming game movies are you looking forward to the most, and give a short reason why.

cov1e_stalker: "Gears of war. The characters and the story have cinematic potential."

Splendid: "The Warcraft movie nuff said [and its not directed by Uwe Boll]"

Death_cometh: "I would have to go with Prince of Persia because it has a great story and also would be the hardest to make a huge mess"

Ajust: "I hate to be unoriginal, but Prince Of Persia sounds like a good one."

Mad Don McKilt: "The Sims. It would be interesting to see how they do it. Also, BioShock has got my attention."

Isengard: "Street fighter, because sometimes watching a train wreck can be a laugh."

Jimbo007: "Shoot me down later, but I'm gunning for Street Fighter!!! I've always enjoyed seeing my favourite one-on-one fighter beating ass down, even if the plot is lame!! REALLY wouldn't mind if Eli Roth decided to make the next Mortal Kombat :)"

Gh0st_828: "I'm going with Max Payne. It's got an addictive story with lots of gunfights. Just the way I like it. Yay!"

creep: "BioShock, Don't just take the games storyline and put it in a movie. I want to see how Rapture was born, or maybe the fall of Rapture."

FreakKing: "BioShock, because it's going to be bloody, scary and based on the game. That's all that is important."

Aequitas: "Prince of Persia - Just imagine, The Matrix, but set in ancient Persia hawt!"

Azimuth: "The Sims, starring a bevy of attractive men I can watch go about their daily business of showering and tickling each other and stuff. Everyone's a voyeur. At least I admit it. :<"

Repline: "I'm looking forward to the game-movie that actually have a storyline, star-power and budget that could lead to entertain a person and perhaps become part of a DVD collection at a later stage. You know the one I'm talking about? Me neither."

solid_snake2: "Metal gear solid. It has such an amazing story, hopefully the movie will do it justice."

wir: "Max Payne. Looks like it could be a really cool/interesting story."

Gazza_N: "None of them. Given the abysmal track record of previous game movies, I'm hesitant to get hyped up over any of the upcoming releases. I'll wait and see."

Turk1sh: "Prince of Persia = elements for good story, lots of battles and special effects - nuff said"

HAVE YOUR SAY ON THE NAG FORUMS: <http://forums.tidemedia.co.za>

CrashHelmut: "Max Payne is a game stylised after two movie genres, the Hong Kong action movie and film noir. So you have a movie, based on a game, based on a movie. BioShock seems the more innovative of the lot."

brazed: "Game Movies? Excited? You're putting those two words in the same sentence? Madness, but if I had to choose one I'm slightly less concerned about, it'll be BioShock. Should have been Ridley Scott directing, but to me it is the only one with potential."

Boggle24: "BioShock and Prince of Persia both hold a lot of promise, but it's Max Payne that gets me all giddy inside. The game got the noir thing down pat, the movie should capitalise on that. Distant pipe dreams are still Halo and Metal Gear Solid movies, a man can dream can't he?"

Raven Gold: "MGS: cuz, ITS PHREAKING MGS DUDE!!!!!"

Bonezmann: "Prince of Persia, mainly because I'm a fanbot."

Fredder: "I don't get hyped up about any game movies, it needs to be really really good to interest me. That I'll only judge for myself once they start showing and the people give real positive feedback."

Atticus: "Max Payne. I loved how it was narrated, kinda reminds me of Sin City how they talk to the audience, loved it about Max Payne. Plus who doesn't like bullet time or the great dives to dodge gunfire :P"

wisp: "Max Payne-just cause it's Max Payne..oh and to c Mona Sax IRL sort off"

Nferno: "Max Payne - The game was as close to a movie as any so they have a pretty solid guideline to work from. I'm hoping that Max Narrates the movie as he does in the game and that they don't overdo the Bullet time."

dammit: "Prince of Persia because I think it'd be really difficult to mess that up...the game practically is a movie."

Telur: "Prince of Persia. The game has such a great atmosphere and story let's hope they will be able to bring this over in the movie. I hope they don't make the time rewind as gimmicky as they did with first person view in the doom movie. :/"

Darkmag: "WARCRAFT -- Blizzard is making one right? I'm not on some kind of drug trip right?"

edg3: "BioShock. I would like to see how it turns out but knowing how movies from games turn out I'm not expecting it to be very good."

PloPshoP: "BioShock, because Uwe Boll is not directing it. Also, the world of Rapture provides so much potential for the big screen."



THE GAUNTLET AND THE GIRL

Impossibly blue eyes stare off into improbable backdrops. A mysterious girl appears and a gauntlet gouges a wall.

THIS IS THE SECOND year that NAG has been invited to Paris to experience Ubisoft's European gaming showcase, Ubidays. This year it was held at the Louvre and the event also included a private tour of the museum at night – wow! The event itself kicked off with a sing and dance (literally) conference where all current Ubisoft games were covered with a few videos and the various developers giving brief talks on their respective projects. The conference was in preparation for the next day where gaming journalists from around the world got to play a few of the games and attended various staged Q&A sessions. It was a good event as these types of events go and Ubisoft has always been quick to get to the point.

But anyway, the biggest news at Ubidays was undoubtedly the new *Prince of Persia* game. Elika (add this to your Word dictionary), a sexy female sidekick has been added to the game and was introduced at the conference. This new character is AI controlled. Fear not, this doesn't mean you'll be babysitting a moron throughout the game and if the developers are to be believed, Elika won't get stuck behind scenery or get in your way while you're trying to enjoy the game. To summarise, she will be contextually appropriate, always keeping up with the player but always out of the way and potentially might just change the way gamers view sidekicks forever. Also important to mention, this new *POP* game has nothing to do with the previous games in the series and is a franchise reboot of sorts. The game also has a different look to it and was described as somewhere between realistic and illustrative – something you need to see for yourself.

Here are three of the other highlights.

TOM CLANCY'S H.A.W.X (HIGH ALTITUDE WARFARE)

We still don't have a clear idea of what the X stands for but that aside, *H.A.W.X* is a next-gen arcade combat flight simulator played in the third person. In all honesty, it looks a lot like *Ace Combat* so if you like that kind of game, then Ubisoft's offering should do the business.

H.A.W.X will also feature voice input so you never have to fuss with the controller to issue commands to your squadron at 40,000 feet... and climbing.

SHAWN WHITE SNOWBOARDING

Shaun White (Olympic Gold Medallist) Snowboarding will see players controlling their favourite snowboarding world champion as he parts the fresh powder (we made that up because we don't know squat about snowboarding lingo). Considering there has been nothing significant on the snowboarding front since *SSX*, this game should be well received by the targeted demographic when it comes out later this year. *Shaun White* will be on-hand to mentor players as they choose their own path down one of four open world mountains, perform tricks or compete in events. The game uses the *Assassin's Creed* engine and promises more than just snowboarding – throwing snowballs for example.

RAVING RABBIDS

They're certainly raving and most definitely rabid. The Rabbids are back and coming to a Wii or DS near you. *Rayman Raving Rabbids TV Party*, to give it its full name, sees Wii players using the Wii Balance Board with their butts to control some of the 65 plus brand-new games on offer. There will be a party mode with support for eight players and the developers are promising new and interesting ways to use the Wii controllers.

THE REST

Well due to space and relevancy issues we're not going to blab on about *Tom Clancy's End War*, *Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway*, *Soul Calibur IV* or *Far Cry 2* here. Because, (deep breath now) *End War* and *Brothers in Arms* have been done to death, *Soul Calibur IV* didn't have anything new to show and *Far Cry 2* has been thoroughly covered in this issue. As the months go along, NAG will bring you more detailed coverage of these and other Ubisoft titles.





BOND IS BACK AND IT'S LOOKING GOOD!

QUANTUM OF SOLACE is not only the 22nd Bond movie, but it's also the title of the 24th Bond game, which is being developed by Treyarch. During our recent trip to the studio, the developers allowed us access to all the juicy info on the game, which will be launch around the same time as the movie later this year.

This first-person shooter will feature our favourite Bond to date, Daniel Craig. During the research phase for this game, Treyarch said it was clear that gamers wanted to get into Bond's shoes and feel like James Bond when they play the game. This is exactly what they have done. *Quantum of Solace* is developed on the brilliant Call of Duty 4 engine, alongside *Call of Duty 5: World at War*, the other game Treyarch is working on at the moment.

The game actually spans two movies, *Casino Royale* and its sequel, *Quantum of Solace* which picks up about an hour after *Casino Royale* ends. Treyarch took some creative liberties (with approval of the movie studios) to tell the parts of the story that overlaps with *Casino Royale*. From the stuff we have seen, Bond fans will love the slightly enhanced part of the story that takes place towards the end of the first movie. While most of the game will be played in the first person, there will be moments when you play in third person. The ratio of content between the first movie and the second is about 50/50 in terms of time spent playing the game.

Beside amazing scenery and good-looking

graphic capabilities, this game also has a few other cards up its sleeve. For one thing, there will be destructible cover. This makes it difficult to sit in one spot and kill the enemy, and once they detect your presence, their persistent gun fire will force you to relocate. The developers are also spending a lot of time on the enemy AI. In fact, they have four programmers working on that part of the game alone. What they hope to achieve is an enemy AI that will dynamically adapt and attack you differently based on your actions.

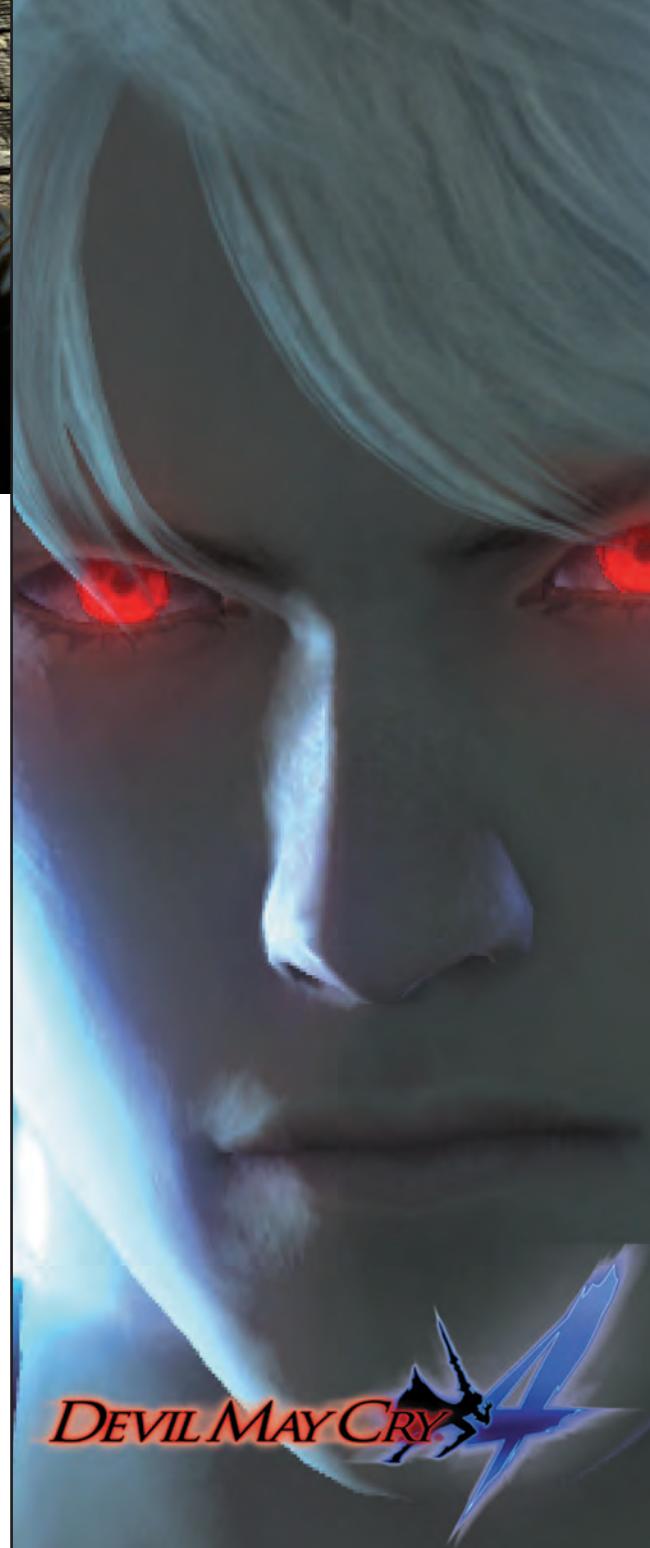
Although there have been Bond games before, both Treyarch and Activision see this as the launch of a brand-new franchise, much like the refreshed Bond movies starting with *Casino Royale*. This new Bond, who is depicted in this game and the new movies, is also different in that he is not as reliant on gadgets as much as his predecessors. This obviously translates back to the game and Bond will now experience more gunfights and hand-to-hand combat than his predecessors. Throughout the game you will have the option to run and gun, or play it like Bond would - stealthy. The latter has the added bonus of a feature called Quick Kill, a silent but deadly manoeuvre executed by Bond on enemy characters to avoid detection. The developers also said that *Quantum of Solace* will feature multiplayer capabilities, but they were tight lipped as to any details about it. The game will be launched on the PC, PS3, Xbox 360, the Nintendo DS and the Wii.

LUCASARTS LAYS OFF EMPLOYEES

Upcoming titles not affected by downsizing

In what seems to have become a recent trend after THQ cut 200 employees loose last month, LucasArts has confirmed "a portion" of its workforce has been given the boot. Although the company refuses to detail the exact number of employees who have lost their jobs or the specific departments affected, Margaret Grohne (vice president of product development) was one of the employees to leave the company on 5 June. Grohne added that Hirschmann's departure was a "mutual decision". However the layoffs will apparently have no affect on any of the upcoming games, according to Grohne, including the *Indiana Jones* title, which was unveiled in 2006. Grohne explained that LucasArts has "no plans to outsource its development to an external studio" and development is continuing at the company's San Francisco office. More about this title, besides its use of the Euphoria animation engine (used in *GTA IV*), should be revealed at E3 next month.

Rumours spread online by now ex-employees of LucasArts about various titles, such as a "Light Saber game" for the Wii and *Star Wars Battlefront 3*.



OUT NOW !



PLAYSTATION 3

PC DVD

XBOX 360

snippets

YOUR ESSENTIAL INFO, NOW IN BITE-SIZED PORTIONS!

FORCE UNLEASHED ADDS MORE PLASTIC BLOCKS...

In case you haven't spotted any of the kits in the toy shops yet, did you know that *Star Wars: The Force Unleashed* (the videogame) has its very own series of LEGO. Here's a look at the latest release in the series. The Rogue Shadow, piloted by Juno Eclipse (an imperial officer) comes with two instruction booklets and 482 pieces and includes Juno Eclipse, a battle-damaged Darth Vader and Vader's Apprentice. The game itself is due for release later this year.



DISNEY CREATES OWN ONLINE COMMUNITY FOR DS

In a bid to keep the kids in their yard, Disney has launched "DGamer", an online community service that lets users create profiles, connect with other users and track accomplishments. Practically every Disney game for the DS will now have DGamer integrated. Graham Hopper, executive vice president and general manager for Disney Interactive Studios has commented, "DGamer was built around the vision to connect Disney videogame fans in a secure, fun environment and it is truly the first integrated online community of its kind to do so on multiple platforms".



EA STOPS WORK ON RED ALERT 3 FOR PLAYSTATION 3

Electronic Arts has halted all work on the upcoming *Red Alert 3* for the PlayStation 3. The Xbox 360 and PC versions remain unaffected and will apparently "benefit from refocused development resources". No reasons were given for the build queue being paused on the PlayStation 3 version, or if development will continue on it at all.



SOUL CALIBUR IV, STAR WARS SHARE CHARACTERS

Secret apprentice makes appearance

IN A RECENT PRESS release, it was revealed that Darth Vader's Secret Apprentice from *Star Wars: The Force Unleashed* will join the cast of *Soul Calibur IV*. While the *Star Wars* game tells the story of Starkiller, Vader's secret apprentice, who hunts down the remaining Jedi Knights after the Great Jedi Purge during Vader's rise to power, *Soul Calibur IV* is the last chapter in the epic struggle between the two legendary swords Soul Calibur and Soul Edge.

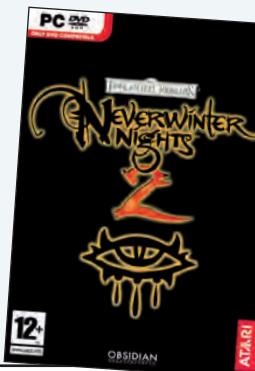
"The Secret Apprentice adds to the depth and excitement the *Soul Calibur* franchise is known to deliver, proving to be another formidable opponent in the quest to obtain the mighty

Soul swords," said Todd Thorson, Director of Marketing and Public Relations for *Soul Calibur*'s developer Namco Bandai Games.

In a game set to pit sword against lightsaber, *Soul Calibur IV* will not only feature Starkiller but Darth Vader and Yoda too. However, Darth Vader will only be available on the Playstation 3 title and the Jedi Master Yoda will only make his appearance on the Xbox 360 version. Whether gamers will be able to download the characters not included in their version is still to be seen but players will be able to battle online for the first time in the history of the franchise.

ATARI ANNOUNCES A SECOND NEVERWINTER NIGHTS 2 EXPANSION

So, you're a fan of the RPG genre? Then you've probably played Obsidian Entertainment's *Neverwinter Nights* 2 and possibly its first expansion, *Mask of The Betrayer*. Depending on the level of enjoyment you got out of these titles, you may be excited to learn that Atari has made a sneaky (very sneaky...) announcement of a second expansion, called *Storm of Zehir*. In a tip of the hat to some of BioWare's older CRPGs, you will be able to create your entire party, as opposed to a single character who recruits other pre-made characters during his/her quest. This allows for a more non-linear approach, so you can travel the game world and dungeon-crawl to your heart's content using the new Overland Map. It seems they're beefing up character interaction, with streamlined party conversations, a "Teamwork Benefit System" and "party feats". Apparently you'll be able to control your own merchant company, and decisions you make will affect the game world's economy. No word yet on when a release is to be expected.



NO MORE EIGHT DAYS AND THE GETAWAY SEQUEL, SAYS SONY

Sony Europe has announced that production at Sony London Studios has stopped on both *Eight Days* and *The Getaway* sequel. The statement from Sony: "It has been agreed that production of both *Eight Days* and *The Getaway* will cease immediately due to the redistribution of resources and budget.

"This decision was made following an internal review of all games and it was deemed that with the incredibly strong list of exclusive first party titles coming up both this year and in the near future, resource should be reallocated to enhance those projects closer to completion."

Both games have not been heard from since their debut trailers from E3 2006, and this move follows shortly after Shuhei Yoshida was appointed as head of Sony Worldwide Studios, replacing Phil Harrison who headed over to Atari. Both games have been cancelled permanently.

THEY SAID IT...

"Before I joined DICE you hear stories about what it's like to work at a company that's just been bought by EA, but I just don't recognise the company that people used to describe"

Ben Cousins, executive producer at DICE

"If you look back at the last few years, all the products that MG5 put out are super highly rated. Somebody like me... The whole reason I am in the game industry is to be making top quality games, you know?"

Kudo Tsunoda, formerly of EA Chicago and now a GM at Microsoft Games Studios

"While there is certainly much to learn by careful study of where film has repeatedly, and at times disastrously, gotten it wrong, the game industry must make certain it ingests these lessons from outside other media, rather than through a process of assimilation."

Todd Eckert, producer of the Cannes award-winning film *Control*

"The point I want to get across about this is - I've got people in this building, about ten examiners who do games, and these are some of the best gamers I've ever come across and these are people who are passionate about games and know a great deal about it."

David Cooke, BBFC's Director



AGE OF CONAN SELLING FAST, FUNCOM POSSIBLY EXCITED... MAYBE...

FUNCOM HAS ANNOUNCED THAT its recent MMORPG release, *Age of Conan: Hyborian Adventures* had over 400,000 people log onto Funcom servers within its first week of sales. That would make *Age of Conan* one of the fastest selling PC game releases of all time, and as can be expected, this makes Funcom all warm and fuzzy inside. Funcom CEO Trond Arne Aas had this to say, "The initial sales and reviews are very encouraging, and it's great to see that so many are enjoying *Age of Conan*, this is just the beginning, and we already look forward to massive updates and cool new features. We believe our focus on making Conan unique and groundbreaking is a key reason for the initial success. This is a focus we will keep and reinforce, and players can expect continued quality and innovation as we enter a new era for the game." *Age of*

Conan rocketed to the top of PC charts in various countries, and has sold well over a million copies to date. Funcom is even calling it, "the biggest MMO launch since *World of Warcraft*". The game was met with some controversy due to its mature nature. It's filled with violence, nudity (read: nipples, both female and otherwise) and all kinds of stuff you wouldn't want your parents to catch you in the general vicinity of. You know a game is aimed at a mature audience when you find out that its players complained about a recent patch for the game, which took a virtual pin to their in-game female avatar's over-inflated bosoms, reducing the size the players had made their avatar's breasts during character creation. If you listen closely, you can actually hear a thousand tiny adolescent male voices cry out in agony...

TAPPING RESOURCES

VALVE PRESIDENT GABE NEWELL recently revealed that his company is pulling in significantly more revenue via its digital distribution platform Steam than boxed copies of games at retail, and at a growth rate of nearly 200%. "At this point, people have had Steam long enough that their experience is that Steam is more reliable than physical media," he said. This is just a more reliable and dependable situation."

With concurrent users now peaking around 1.25 million, Steam is set to roll out a new feature set in response to community requests. Available as part of the new Steamworks enterprise, Steam Cloud will extend the platform's services to storage of game data, including save game and key binding information about players' games. This means that in addition to a player's profile information, all other game data will be accessible from any PC running Steam. The first games to support this will include the *Half-Life* series, *Counter-Strike* and *Team Fortress 2*, as well as forthcoming co-op shooter *Left 4 Dead*.



PUZZLE QUEST DEVELOPER RECEIVES DEATH THREATS

AUSTRALIAN DEVELOPER INFINITE INTERACTIVE, famed for the addictive *Puzzle Quest: Challenge of the Warlords*, has received several death threats over a glitch in the PlayStation Portable version of the game.

Speaking at this year's Captivate 08 in Las Vegas, chief executive officer Steven Fawker admitted that the studio was unaccustomed to death threats. "One death threat in 25 years of game development," he said. "*Puzzle Quest* comes out and I had six death threats and one bomb threat."

The exact glitch in question affects how computer-controlled characters function in battle. Basically, the special abilities of your companions don't work.

Speaking to www.eurogamer.com, Fawker commented that while he thought two of the threats were serious he did not report them to the police as most of the e-mails came from the United States. He also went on to say that, "it really shouldn't affect the gameplay in any significant way".

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UBISOFT



GUINNESS WORLD RECORDS AND GAMING

GTA IV

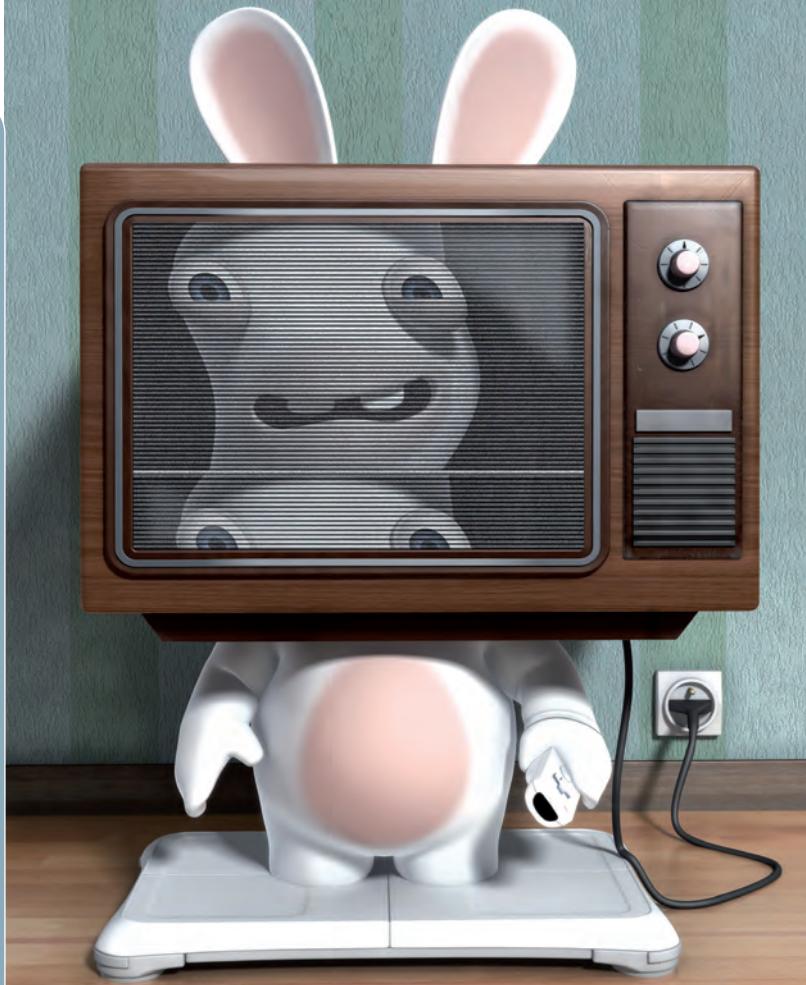
It seems that *GTA IV* just can't stay out of the news, it's not Electronic Arts trying to buy them, then it's grandmothers trying to shut them down. Just imagine the stress if you worked there. End of the day, however, it's all good news for the company because they're a hot property. On the tail of all of this, *GTA IV* will be making an entry into the *Guinness World Records* as the biggest entertainment release of all time. Newly released sales figures show that *GTA IV* sold 3.6 million units and earned \$310 million in its first day of release. This then gets the award for highest Grossing Video Game in 24 hours and the Highest Revenue Generated by an Entertainment product in 24 hours. This far surpasses all other videogames, book releases and even movies. Here's the current list of top entertainment genres: Fastest-selling videogame in 24 hours: *Halo 3* at \$170 million, Fastest-selling theatrical movie in 24 hours: *Spider-Man 3* at \$60 million, Fastest-selling book in 24 hours: *Harry Potter & The Deathly Hallows* at \$220 million.

VIDEO KOJIMA

Hideo Kojima was in London recently to pick up his Guinness Word Record certificates. He received a certificate for *Metal Gear Solid* as the first videogame to fully utilise stealth as part of the play dynamic and another one for *Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty* as the biggest selling stealth game on PS2.

CAPCOM'S WARNING TO INDEPENDENT DEVELOPERS

Adam Boyes, business development director for Capcom USA, believes you've got to stick to your guns and never allow the publisher to whom you're pitching your game idea to ruin your possibly great game by skewing your vision for it. "Look to all the big guys out there – BioWare, Insomniac, all these huge developers – they didn't get there by doing any old project that came their way," says Boyes. "They chose their battles, they chose their projects and they stuck with them."



UBISOFT PLANS UBIQUITY

Next stop, Raving Rabbids: The Motion Picture

AUBISOFT'S RECENT INDUSTRY house party, CEO Yves Guillemot detailed his company's ambitious plans to expand beyond gaming and out into the multimedia entertainment business. Alongside their recently announced entry into fully 3D gaming with *Avatar* (a joint venture with Hollywood luminary James Cameron), Ubisoft is setting its sights on the CGI film industry, bridging the gap between their various enterprises. "Our goal is to create a studio that will be very high quality, our goal is to try to get to the level of quality of Peter Jackson's Weta studio," revealed Guillemot. "We don't need to be always making the movie but what we have to do is make sure that what's necessary for our games is done close to us so we can reuse assets. Or we can have a specific relationship with a director

who is going to do 3D imaging in such a way that we can also use them in our games. The goal is to produce the images, the animations, to work on defining scenarios, because that's what we need in our games."

The company plans to recruit an additional 900 new staffers over the next year in order to facilitate this growth. In the meantime, however, the studio is working on a television series, although Guillemot remains coy. "It's based on the different games we are doing. We are really at the beginning. We can't say much now but the more we go into these things the more we see the potential."

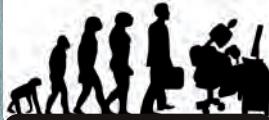
Until then, gamers can look forward to a much longed-for sequel with *Beyond Good & Evil 2*, although possibly with some trepidation. "It will be more accessible than the first one," predicted Guillemot, somewhat ominously.

RESIDENT EVIL 5 UNCHANGED AFTER RACE CRITICISMS

When the first *Resident Evil 5* trailer was shown at E3 2007 there was no doubt that someone somewhere would get the wrong idea and start making a fuss over nothing. Then along came blog Black Looks who wrote that *Resident Evil 5*'s imagery of the white protagonist beating up the black zombies was "problematic on so many levels, including the depiction of Black people as inhuman savages". Later, *Newsweek's* general editor of technology N'Gai Croal said that the trailer "dovetailed with classic racist imagery" and

that "clearly no one black worked on this game".

At Captivate '08, *Resident Evil 5* producer Jun Takeuchi told www.kotaku.com that the cries of racism "didn't have any effect on the game design", in light of new media showing a more racially diverse enemy menagerie. "In terms of the reaction, we're in the business of entertainment," Takeuchi said. "We didn't set out to make a racist game or a political statement. We did feel there was a misunderstanding about the initial trailer."



THE EVOLUTION OF BATTLEFIELD



Codename Eagle (1999)



Battlefield 1942 (2002)



Battlefield Vietnam (2004)



Battlefield 2 (2005)



Battlefield 2 Modern Combat (2005)



Battlefield 2142 (2006)



Battlefield Bad Company (2008)





SHANE KIM (CORPORATE VICE president) of Microsoft Game Studios said he is "very happy" the company has yet to dip its toe into the handheld market. He believes the games Microsoft produces aren't suitable for that market. "I'm very happy we didn't get into it, because launching a handheld platform is like launching another Xbox 360. You have to be fully committed, as an organisation, from a resource standpoint, to doing that," he told www.eurogamer.net during an interview. • Sony Computer Entertainment America has unveiled the PlayStation-edu programme. This gives universities and colleges access to PS2 and PSP development kits. Qualified schools need to purchase the hardware and sign legal documents with Sony to get access to the SDK, software, documentation, demo code and samples. Not intended for game creation, the programme is more for computer science and engineering teachers who want to use the dev kits to teach students how the hardware works. "We expect this program to be a great tool to teach students about the PlayStation platforms," said Mark Danks, senior manager, developer support, said on the PlayStation blog. • Lazard Capital Markets analyst Colin Sebastian warns against counting Sony out prematurely. "Despite ongoing modest sales trends for PS3 hardware in North America, we believe the platform may benefit from an improving software line-up – *MGS 4*, *LittleBigPlanet*, *Resistance 2* – and the late 2008 rollout of more robust online services," he wrote in a note to investors. • Forbes (it's just so much fun to say!) is expecting Apple to launch the long-promised Apple Store feature next week, which allows outside developers to sell iPhone and iPod touch applications. Forbes says that Apple might compete with the Nintendo DS, and possibly win. • During a live interview with www.eurogamer.net, Insomniac (*Resistance*, *Jak & Daxter*) developer Ted Prince let slip that "great improvements" are coming to the PlayStation Network. • Management director for Xbox 360 and Xbox LIVE, Aaron Greenberf, has told MTV Multiplayer that there are big revamps coming to Xbox LIVE. "Longer term, we're looking to make the ability to find content and organise the 17,000 pieces of content we have a lot better." • Elsewhere, Ubisoft has asked Sony to please act quickly on the "directionless" PSP. Managing director Rob Cooper told www.gamesindustry.biz that Sony seems unsure of how to market an "over-priced and too technical for mainstream consumer" handheld. "Sony needs to show us a bit more about what its plans are to convince the publisher to invest lots more money into it. Especially when you've got the DS selling at such a tremendous pace." • Tom Prata, Nintendo of America's senior director of project development has revealed that there are over 100 WiiWare games in development.

CRYYSIS WARHEAD ANNOUNCED

You can never have too much of a good thing. When *Crysis* was released last year, its cutting-edge graphics, solid game dynamic and slick, polished feel wowed many a gamer the world over (totally worth selling that kidney to pay for the rig to play the game). Developed by award-winning independent studio Crytek, the game made quite an impression, and was one of the highest rated games of 2007. So more than a few people are going to be excited that Crytek and Electronic Arts have announced *Crysis Warhead*, which is not quite a sequel, nor is it a prequel. It's actually a story that runs parallel to the original. In development at Crytek's Budapest studio, the game is built on an enhanced version of Crytek's own CryENGINE 2 technology. "We were very pleased with the reception of *Crysis* from both gamers and media after our launch last year," said Cevat Yerli, CEO and President of Crytek. "That being said, one of the key principles of our studio is to always raise the bar. With *Warhead*, we are focusing on refining our storytelling and game performance, while also delivering more of the visually stunning graphics and immersive, free-roaming gameplay everyone loved in *Crysis*." This time around players ditch the original character ("Nomad"), and take on the role of a slightly more aggressive character from the original game – Sergeant Sykes, better known as "Psycho". Utilising the nanosuit to heighten his combat effectiveness, Psycho will have access to an even larger array of customisable weapons and vehicles than in the original game, making him stand out as the badass to call when things go pear shaped. Psycho's story will run parallel to Nomad's story in the original. *Crysis Warhead* is planned for release later this year as a PC exclusive.



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SAM & MAX: SEASON 3 IN EARLY 2009

With *Season 2* recently having ended, fans are most likely wondering when the next season of Telltale Games' excellent adventure series is due. In an interview with www.thebbs.com, Emily Morganti from Telltale Games stated that early 2009 is when they're planning for release. *Season 1* on your Wii should keep you busy in the meantime.

BIOSHOCK 3!

As we all know, *BioShock 2* is on the way and will be developed by Take-Two's new studio 2k Marin (it was previously handled by Ken Levine's 2k Boston studio). Recently, Strauss Zelnick, Take-Two Interactive Chairman spoke about a third game coinciding with the theatrical release of *BioShock*. "It's unlikely that the picture would be released to coincide with *BioShock 2*. It would be more likely that it would be released coincidentally with *BioShock 3*. That also remains to be seen," said Zelnick. *BioShock 2* is looking at a release date towards the end of 2009 and the company has stated that every three years is optimal for new instalments. How all of this plays out remains to be seen.



SPOREPEDIA GOES LIVE

Looking forward to the *Spore* Creature Creator? Well, Maxis has put their Sporepedia up on the Internet. A nifty little tool that allows you to upload creatures, ships and buildings, you create and download other users' creations for use in your own creature creator. You can also check out some useful hints and an FAQ for guidance on how to create your creatures. The *Spore* Creature Creator should be available for download on 17 June, either as a free trial or to buy for around \$9.95. www.spore.com/sporepedia is the place to go...

INFAMOUS REVEALED

Gaming magazine *Game Informer* ran a cover story on *inFAMOUS*, a PS3-exclusive title developed by Sucker Punch. Playing as a super-powered, electric bolt-firing, wall-running dude named Dylan, you'll be able to explore Empire City, an open-world environment involved in all manner of cataclysmic events, all the while having to deal with karmic decisions like whether or not to help that little old lady cross the street without being hit by that giant robot.

TAKING OUT THE TRASH

MICROSOFT HAS ANNOUNCED PLANS to scrap poorly performing Xbox LIVE Arcade content, with Director for Product Management Aaron Greenberg citing the need for developers to "take more time, make use of the new additional storage space and focus on game quality now more than ever to ensure the title is well received." This follows the recent maximum XBLA file size increase from 150MB to 350MB. Titles offered by the service for more than six months, with an average of 65% or less on www.metacritic.com and a trial conversion rate of less than 6% will be reviewed for delisting later this year. Goodbye, *Shrek-N-Roll*. "Our focus with Xbox LIVE Arcade is going to be on quality over quantity," added Greenberg.



BRUCE WILLIS AS KANE!?

APPARENTLY BRUCE WILLIS IS in negotiations to play Adam "Kane" Marcus in the upcoming *Kane and Lynch* film adaptation by Lions Gate Entertainment, reports *Variety*. Simon Crane will be making his feature directorial debut after having served as second-unit director and stunt coordinator on *Hancock*, *Mr. & Ms. Smith*, *Troy* as well as *X-Men: The Last Stand*.

Back in 2007, rumours on the Internet labelled Willis as Kane and Billy Bob Thornton in the role of Lynch, although no announcements have been made regarding Thornton. According to *Variety*, the role of Lynch has yet to be cast.

The *Kane and Lynch* story follows a mercenary (Kane) who is forced into an alliance with schizophrenic killer (Lynch) as the pair becomes roped into retrieving a stolen microchip. Shooting is to begin before the end of the year.

GAMING CHARTS

Look & Listen
DVD • CD • GAMES MP3 • ACCESSORIES

LOOK & LISTEN RECOMMENDS...

PLAYSTATION 3

- 1 Grand Theft Auto IV
- 2 HAZE
- 3 Battlefield: Bad Company
- 4 Metal Gear Solid 4
- 5 Lost Planet

XBOX 360

- 1 Grand Theft Auto IV
- 2 Ninja Gaiden II
- 3 Unreal Tournament III
- 4 The Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian
- 5 Command & Conquer III: Kane's Wrath

PLAYSTATION 2

- 1 LEGO Indiana Jones: The Original Adventures
- 2 Race Driver: GRID
- 3 Incredible Hulk
- 4 UEFA Euro 2008
- 5 Iron Man

PC

- 1 Mass Effect
- 2 Devil May Cry 4
- 3 Final Fantasy XI
- 4 The Sims 2 Double Deluxe
- 5 The Sims 2 Kitchen & Bathroom Stuff

PSP

- 1 God of War: Chains of Olympus
- 2 ATV Off Road Fury Pro
- 3 Superbike Challenge 08
- 4 WALL-E
- 5 Ford Racing Off Road

WII

- 1 Wii Fit
- 2 Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock
- 3 Mario Kart Wii
- 4 Hannah Montana Spotlight World Tour
- 5 Speed Racer



April figures provided by GfK
www.gfsa.co.za

PLAYSTATION 3

- 1 Gran Turismo 5 Prologue
- 2 MotorStorm
- 3 Grand Theft Auto IV
- 4 Resistance: Fall of Man
- 5 Army of Two

XBOX 360

- 1 Grand Theft Auto IV
- 2 Army of Two
- 3 Forza Motorsport 2
- 4 Call of Duty 3
- 5 Project Gotham Racing 3

PLAYSTATION 2

- 1 God of War II
- 2 FIFA 2008
- 3 Need for Speed: Underground
- 4 Burnout Revenge
- 5 God of War Platinum

PC

- 1 Command & Conquer 3: Kane's Wrath
- 2 Assassin's Creed
- 3 The Sims 2 Freetime
- 4 Lord of the Rings: Battle for Middle-earth
- 5 FIFA 2007

PSP

- 1 Burnout Legends
- 2 FIFA 2008
- 3 Need for Speed: ProStreet
- 4 FIFA 2007
- 5 The Godfather

WII

- 1 Wii Sports
- 2 Big Brain Academy
- 3 Wii Play
- 4 Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Games
- 5 Super Mario Galaxy

DUNGEON SIEGE 3 ANNOUNCED, SPACE SIEGE LOOKING GOOD

IN A RECENT INTERVIEW, Chris Taylor (head honcho of Gas Powered Games) let a few details about *Dungeon Siege 3* slip. One thing that may come as a bit of a surprise is that it seems they're opting for a single-character adventure (much like GPG's other upcoming hack-and-slash epic, *Space Siege*) rather than the multiple character party-based system of the previous games. According to Mr. Taylor, "There will be some things that are very much like *Dungeon Siege 1* and *2*, but some things will be simplified. I am done with multi-character parties; I really think that it's all going to be about a single hero. It's too much to manage." Damn, does that mean no pack mules? We can only hope we'll at least have our faithful veggie-munching, goblin-kicking carry-alls at our side or that the main character is a donkey-boy with a massive inventory. In other Gas Powered Games related news, *Space Siege* is coming sometime this year, and it's looking good. Word has it that tactical combat is the order of the day, with the player able to set up ambushes, take cover to dodge bullets and use a myriad of abilities to overcome the sci-fi-based enemies. The decisions you make as to how you choose to upgrade the main character's abilities will apparently have far-reaching consequences on your play experience, with multiple game paths. Will you choose to forsake your humanity by adding cybernetic enhancements, or would you rather remain truly human at the expense of the extra power? High-tech weaponry and cool gadgets all round, as is to be expected, all backed by a sci-fi story which takes place on the Armstrong, a massive colony ship that managed to escape from Earth during an alien attack. The game seems to be shaping up quite nicely. But the best part of it all? You get a customisable robot buddy.



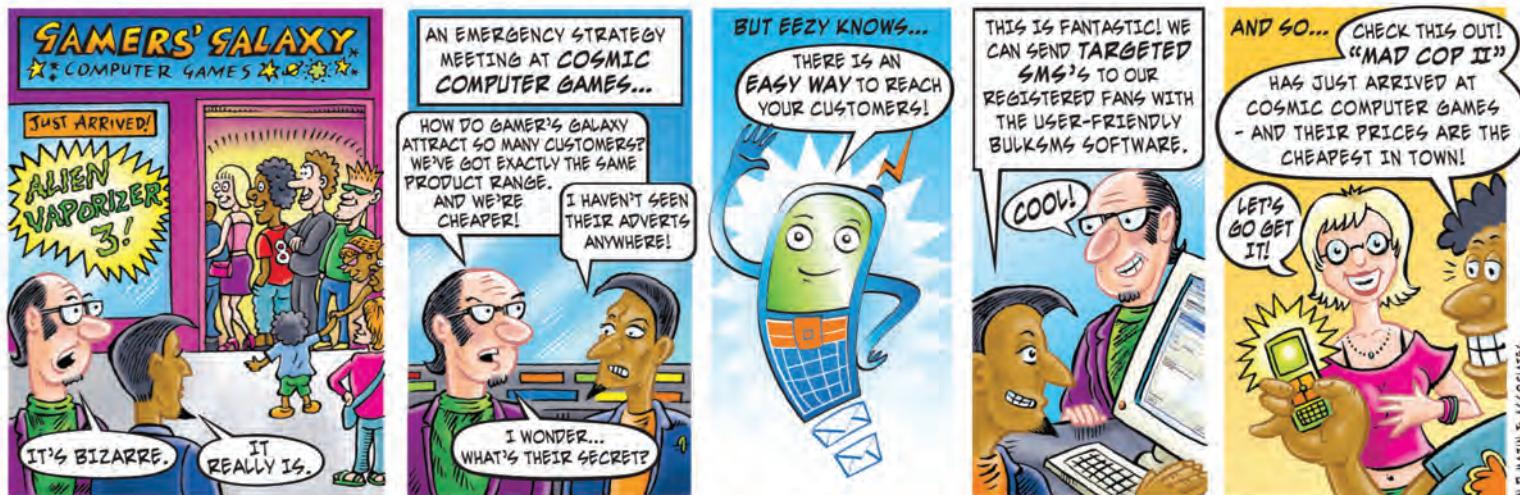
LEONARDO DICAPRIO TO STAR IN ATARI FLICK

Having already played Howard Hughes in *The Aviator* and Frank Abagnale in *Catch Me If You Can*, among many other famous names, Leonardo DiCaprio is about to add another important role to the list. Nolan Bushnell, who is considered one of the original fathers of videogames as he founded Atari together with Ted Dabney in 1972, will be portrayed by Leo in an upcoming movie about his life.

Also the founder of the not quite as successful Chuck E. Cheese restaurant chain, the rights to Bushnell's life story were given to writers Brian Hecker and Craig Sherman. The movie, entitled *Atari*, has been picked up by Paramount Pictures and will be produced by DiCaprio's Appian Way Production company.

EEZY DOES IT... WITH BULKSMS

THE EASIER WAY!





WEE! PITFALL

SOME OLDER GAMERS (grey-hair variety) might be stoked to know that Activision is currently tooling a new *Pitfall* experience exclusively for the Wii. Now do bear in mind, the first time gamers around the world saw *Pitfall!* was back in 1982 (that's 26 years ago for the mathematically challenged). The new game is called *Pitfall: The Big Adventure* and is currently being put together by developer Edge of Reality for Activision. Edge of Reality is currently working on *The Incredible Hulk* game for SEGA and Marvel and interestingly also did a version of *Pitfall*, *Pitfall: The Lost Expedition* for the GameCube, PlayStation 2, Windows and Xbox back in 2004. In the new *Pitfall*, players will find themselves guiding Pitfall Harry as he swings on vines, searches for treasure, solves puzzles and dodges crocodiles. Set in the Peruvian jungle, the game will have over sixty levels including rainforests, caves and the odd glacial mountain. Many of the game mechanics have been designed specifically to take advantage of the motion-sensing Wii controls. Imagine carefully timed swinging of the Wii Remote to avoid falling off a vine and into a crocodile infested water feature – sounds like fun. "Wii is a natural and perfect fit for a *Pitfall* game, and it's been fantastic to revolutionize this classic franchise through the application of the innovative Wii game mechanics. It's a completely new experience for the gamer," said Binu Philip, President of Edge of Reality.



This is what the game looked like on the Atari 2600 in 1982

JULY RELEASES

Subject to change | Release list and special offers provided by www.kalahari.net

Date	Game	Platforms	Date	Game	Platforms
3	Command & Conquer: Kane's Wrath Pre-order for R518.36. Save R80!	360	TBA	Motostorm Complete	PS3
3	The Sims 2: Ikea Home Stuff Pack	PC	TBA	Eyetoy Kinetic	PS2
3	The Sims 2: Apartments Expansion Pack Pre-order for R259.16. Save R40!	PC	TBA	Eyetoy Kinetic Combat	PS2
4	Ninja Gaiden: Dragon Sword	NDS	TBA	Eyetoy Total Fitness	PS2
4	Dragonball Z: Burst Limit	PS3, 360	TBA	Eyetoy Total Combat	PS2
4	FlatOut Ultimate Carnage	PC	TBA	Secret Agent Clank	PSP
4	Ford Off Road Racing	Wii	TBA	Buzz! Master Quizz	PSP
11	Smash Court Tennis	360	TBA	Echochrome	PSP
18	Guitar Hero: On Tour Pre-order for R517.46.	DS	TBA	Devil May Cry 4	PC
25	Guitar Hero Aerosmith with Guitar Controller	PS3, 360, Wii	TBA	Dimensity	PC
TBA	Spectrobes Collector Pack	DS	TBA	We Love Golf	Wii
TBA	Suite Life of Zack and Cody	DS	TBA	Pool Party with Pool Cue	Wii
TBA	Cory in the House	DS	TBA	Dancing Stage Hottest Party 2	Wii
TBA	Buzz Quizz TV	PS3	TBA	Bangai-O	DS
			TBA	Shaun the Sheep	DS



THE NUMBERS

250,000

People who have downloaded the iPhone SDK during the first 95 days [source: Steve Jobs]

\$98.2 MILLION

Q2 net profit (period ending 30 April 2008) for Take-Two [source: Take-Two]

10 MILLION

Call of Duty 4 units sold [source: Infinity Ward]

1 MILLION

Copies of *Age of Conan: Hyborian Adventures* sold in less than 3 weeks [source: Funcom]

1 BILLION

Virtual world users in ten years [source: Strategy Analytics]

100

WiiWare games in development [source: Nintendo of America]

400,000

Age of Conan: Hyborian Adventures users in the first week [source: Funcom]

10 YEARS

Potential disbarment for Jack Thompson [source: Florida Bar]

55 MILLION

Tom Clancy series units sold [source: Ubisoft]

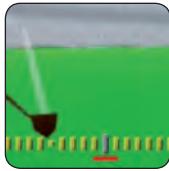
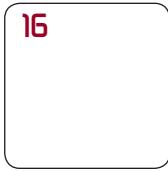
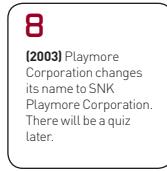
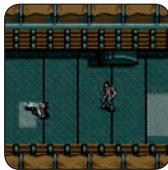
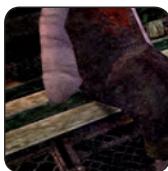
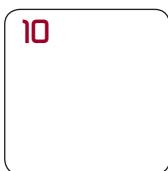
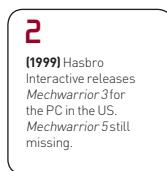
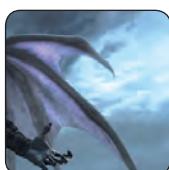


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THIS DAY IN GAMING: JULY



CAPTION OF THE MONTH

Every month we'll choose a boring, odd or peculiar screenshot from any random game and write a bad caption for it. Your job is to come up with a better caption. The winner will get a free game from Vivendi Universal Games. Send your captions to ed@nag.co.za with the subject line **[July Caption]**.

JULY CONTEST

NAG'S LAME

ATTEMPT: "Steve Irwin makes a cameo in Metal Gear Solid 3 as the little-known character Solid Croc."



vivendi GAMES

JUNE WINNERS

"After much debate, it was decided that lighting a match just wasn't enough!"

Russell Clarke

"Fred's survival training kicked in when confronted by the monster floater."

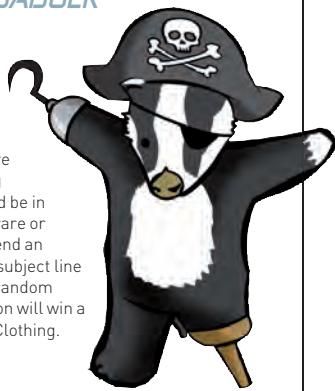
André du Preez

RULES: [1] If you don't use the correct subject line, your mail will be automatically filtered by our spam software and deleted. [2] If you think sending in 20 captions for the same screenshot is how you want to play the system, then put them all in the same mail or we'll keep the top one and delete the rest. You probably won't win anyway because you can't follow simple instructions. And people who can't follow simple instructions don't deserve to win things. [3] Obey all posted speed limits. [4] Never run with scissors. [5] There is no spoon. [6] Don't tell me what I can't do!

BADGER, BADGER, BADGER

Well it seems that our efforts to hide the badger were a little better this month.

Congratulations to John Edwards (we're assuming this isn't the former US presidential candidate. Oh how the mighty have fallen) for finding him. He's hiding out again, so go find him. He could be in a screenshot, on a piece of hardware or anywhere, really. Find him and send an e-mail to ed@nag.co.za with the subject line **[July Badger]**. We'll announce a random winner next month and that person will win a T-shirt and lanyard from RudRa Clothing.



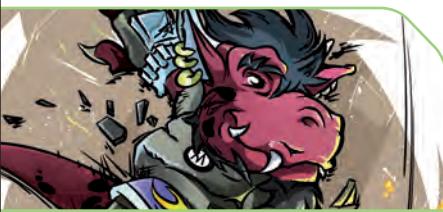
LAST MONTH'S WINNER

John Edwards, p50



kalahari.net 
 PC | Wii | PS3 | XBOX 360

Miktar's Meanderings



by Miktar Dracon

Captain N: The Game Master

(Or: Videogame shows we fondly remember.)

BETWEEN 1989 AND 1993, an American cartoon series followed the adventures of Kevin Keene, a teenager from California, and his dog Duke, who were summoned to another universe called Videoland. You may remember it – it was called *Captain N: The Game Master*. To get to Videoland, Kevin and Duke were sucked into a vortex (called the Ultimate Warp Zone) that formed on Kevin's television. Basically, there was this ancient prophecy and Kevin was destined to become the hero, "Captain N: The Game Master," and save Videoland from the evil forces led by Mother Brain (from the *Metrod* series). Armed only with a Zapper (the NES light gun) and a belt buckle shaped like an NES controller (called the "Power Pad"), Kevin not only had to save the universe but also had to prove himself to the doubting "N Team," which consisted of Princess Lana, Simon Belmont (from *Castlevania*), Mega Man and Pit (from *Kid Icarus*). None of those jerks had any confidence in Kevin (at first), but eventually Kevin rose to the challenge and beat the bad guys.

Being around nine years old and after watching the first few episodes, I ran out and found a piece of wood (stolen from someone's garage, no doubt) and quickly set about making my very own Power Pad. I carved in all the required shapes: a cross for the directional pad, two buttons for the A and B buttons and even the 'Turbo' A and B that my Reggie's Entertainment System (a hard-won Christmas gift) had. Whereas the one in the show let Kevin stop time or gave him super speed over short distances, my wooden, faux-NES-controller belt buckle (it dangled on a string tied around my waist since I didn't have a belt) didn't do squat. But it sure was a lot of fun for an afternoon, running around pretending to be Captain N. I lost the Power Pad somewhere.

The cartoon itself was nirvana for a young gamer: lead characters from popular Nintendo games at the time, various cameo appearances by other awesome characters from more Nintendo games and an all-round entertaining action-adventure centred on the videogames the show parodied. It was funny too – the humour making light of the loose laws of reality that governed Videoland.

Then came *Video Power*: Devoted to NES games, *Video Power* ran for a few years before 1991 and had live-action segments and a cartoon starring characters from Acclaim games. The live-action segments centred

around show host, "Johnny Arcade," who'd ride in on a skateboard and flip this giant power switch on the wall to mark the start of the next awesome half an hour of your life. Johnny Arcade would review current NES games and even preview upcoming titles, giving hints and tips in his own wry, witty style. It was easy to get lost in his eyes.

The cartoon portion was called *The Power Team*, an adventure series with Max Force (the cop from *Narc*), Kuros (the knight from *Wizards and Warriors*), Tyrone (a basketball player from *Arch Rivals*), Kwirk (a tomato from a self-titled Game Boy puzzle game) and Bigfoot (the monster truck who had his own game back in the day). *The Power Team* was actually quite lame, even back then, but it was a cartoon and there were previews of games I wanted after it, so I watched it anyway. *Video Power* underwent a major remake after 1991, and was turned into a game show hosted by Johnny Arcade. But that version never appeared on a TV near me.

The idea of having a giant power switch on the wall that turns on lights, consoles, music and arcade machines is powerful imagery that has forever left its mark on my soul.

Then came *Cybernet* (and I can hear the cheer from the NAG readers even from here) and its nebulous pre-1996 run. *Cybernet* utterly nailed the Gaming Show formula for me and remains practically uncontested. No live-action, idiotic presenters trying to sound as if they actually know what they're talking about, just some sweet computer-generated imagery of a robot with a TV for a head and a sultry female voiceover (Lucy Longhurst) talking about games as if she actually has a clue (while in the background videogame footage rolls). It was pretty much plug after plug for new games and consoles, but that was just fine for the starving gamer.

The face of the videogame television show sure has changed. Now it's all 'personality-driven' product reviews with people like Morgan Webb and Adam Sessler on TechTV trying to act all 'hip' with the gaming crowd. To be honest, I can barely watch a videogame-centric show anymore without wanting to punch the host. Perhaps Uncle Miktar is getting old, but a part of me holds on to that frail glimmer of hope that one day the videogame show that actually cares about videogames will once again rise from the ashen bog of the industry as we know it. **NAG**



The idea of having a giant power switch on the wall that turns on lights, consoles, music and arcade machines is powerful imagery that has forever left its mark on my soul.





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Dammit



by Megan Hughes

The Essential Guide to Facebook Etiquette

AS MUCH AS YOU might be loathed to admit it, like so many others on this planet, you've probably joined the hoards and signed up for Facebook. If you haven't, that's okay. Everyone understands your desperate need to feel somehow superior by being different to the crowd. If you have, that's okay too, because most of us are in the same boat as you and understand the impulsive addiction that drives you to update your status.

A fact you most likely already know: Facebook was originally started in 2004 as a social-networking site for American university students. Right now, it is open to anyone over the age of thirteen. And while the fact that virtually anyone can connect to everyone else on the network is one of the reasons for its success, it is most probably one of the reasons the Facebook Etiquette guide is so essential. Apparently, not everyone was inbred with basic ideas of how not to be annoying.

But before we get into the rules, which, if followed, will probably make you a friend most people would like to have listed on their page, there is just one another suggestion from SugarRae in her *The Updated Unofficial and Smartass Guide to Using Facebook* (which can be found at <http://www.sugarrae.com/the-updated-unofficial-and-smartass-guide-to-using-facebook/>):

"You have exactly ten minutes to change your picture from the question mark to a real picture once you sign up. Seriously, it's Facebook, not question-mark book."

Now, onto the rules:

- 1. Don't be a stalker.** If you don't know them, or they don't know you, they're not your friends – so don't add them to your friend list. Friend lists are for people you actually know and/or like.
- 2. Limit the invitations you send.** Don't invite every single person on your friend list to use every application you add, every group you join, every event you plan on attending. Chances are that if they wanted to sign up for these things, they would have already.
- 3. Stop joining obnoxious/unnecessary groups.** If you think blondes have more fun, that's great, but you really don't have to join a group with that title just to let everyone know. Joining these groups doesn't make you somehow cooler or smarter, so don't do it. The NAG group, of course, is neither obnoxious nor unnecessary.
- 4. Lose some applications.** If your page takes ages to load because of all the retarded applications you insist on signing up for, it is highly unlikely that people will post anything remotely resembling a nice message on your wall (if they even manage to find your wall at all that is). Either delete them or use the extended profile button. It works miracles, I promise.
- 5. Leave the drunken/naked/embarrassing photos at home.** When posting pictures on Facebook, always ask yourself the question, "Would I want my mom/boss/potential boss/potential date to see these?" and edit the albums accordingly. And remember, they're laughing at you, not with you.
- 6. Avoid constantly updating your status.** We understand that it's a nervous compulsion, but instead of letting everyone know about the interesting things you're doing or thinking, it just tells everyone you're so bored/ addicted that you're back on Facebook anyway. Yes, this includes you too, Miktar.
- 7. Statuses should be legible.** If you must update your status, then make it both worth reading as well as readable. All CAPITALS or half CaPiTaLs make most people want to tear out their eyes. Please be kind to eyes everywhere.
- 8. Use a real language.** If you want to communicate with someone via their wall or other messaging service on Facebook, use a language discernable to the reader. English perhaps?
- 9. Keep 'poking' to a minimum.** Pokes are ultimately just annoying notices that have someone's name attached. If you want to be noticed by a particular person, refer to rule 8 and send them a message.
- 10. Don't log onto Facebook Chat if you're too busy to use it.** Seriously, if you're too busy, why are you logged in?

Well, that should cover the basics, but expect an advanced course sometime in the future for those brave enough to go the extra distance. In the meantime, play nice and try not to be your annoying self on the Internet. **NAG**

“ Apparently, not everyone was inbred with basic ideas of how not to be annoying.





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Look & Listen
For the Fans



by Walt Pretorius

More Social Retardation

THE GAMING INDUSTRY IS a funny beast. The events that take place on the business side of gaming can be quite cutthroat, but sometimes the relations between game publishers and gamers can be phenomenally laughable. Take *Age of Conan*, for example.

Age of Conan: Hyborian Adventures is a new PC-based MMO game that is doing very well overseas. It is giving *World of Warcraft* a run for its money, although whether it will get to that level of success remains to be seen. Still, the game's performance is great, and the elated publishers, Funcom, recently released the first (and almost required these days) patch. Subsequently, they have had to issue an apology for changes made by the patch. Did it mess up game dynamics? No. Did it break the game, making it a worse playing experience? No. What it did (accidentally, according to Funcom) was giving all female characters a breast reduction. The forum boards related to the game went nuts, as millions of the less socially adept gamers out there (who still seem to get their rocks off over mammary gland pixels) hit the virtual roof over the smaller boobs in their favourite new game. "Oh, I stopped playing *Age of Conan* when my sexy female character went from a triple-D cup size to a C." It's wonderfully hilarious when you get down to the things that gamers complain about. The modern trend towards smaller breasts being more appealing has apparently not reached the repressed gamer yet. (Please note, before you write your 14-page letter of complaint, the previous statement did not call all gamers repressed... there is a handful of gamers out there who do know how to pull a chick*. I admit that.)

"Funcom can confirm that some of the female models in the game have had the size of their breasts changed. This is due to an unintended change in data that was introduced in an earlier patch – data which controls the so-called morph values associated with character models and the size of their respective body parts," read part of

the apology that Funcom issued recently. "We are working on a fix for this and your breasts should be back to normal soon." Pure gold.

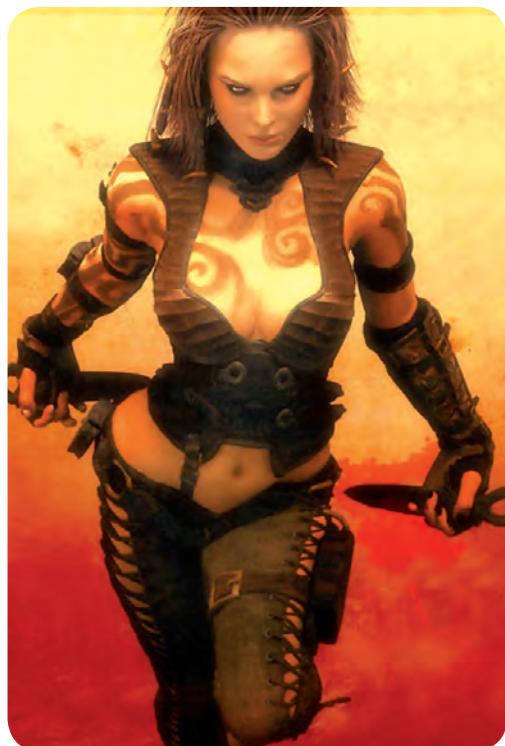
It makes me wonder, yet again, about the social skills of gamers, as does another little factoid I managed to dig up. Apparently, over in the States (where people are repressed to start with, thanks to the Republicans), some guy met a girl on *World of Warcraft*, and decided to run off with her. The gent, one Morgan Douglas Jones, and Sadie Julian ran away to another state. The problem was that Jones is 27 and Julian is 14. No matter how much you like the person you meet online, underage is underage, folks. The problem may have stemmed from many things, of course. Jones may be a paedophile, or he may just be stupid because he hails from Idaho** (where, apparently, cousins marry). The problem is that it allows people like me (and a lot worse than me) to call gamers socially inept.

It is a symptom of the modern age. The Internet is isolating people. Sure, allowing them to communicate effortlessly over massive distances is fantastic, but when a guy can so easily pick up an underage girl, and seems to think that it's okay, you can see an obvious problem arising. It is therefore equally obvious that companies such as Funcom need to be careful when issuing across-the-board boob-reduction patches... bigger boobs in *World of Warcraft* might have kept Jones behind his computer with a jar of Vaseline, rather than stalking and abducting a young girl.

By the way, before you say that maybe he wasn't a gamer and Internet stalker, but a dangerous man making use of the Internet only as a way to get to his intended victims, the car Jones was driving had a license plate that read OMGROFL. I kid you not. And I rest my case. **NAG**

* I'm assuming that you're not worried about the 14-page letters from female gamers then? Ed.

“We are working on a fix for this and your breasts should be back to normal soon.”





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Q&A:

FAR CRY 2

Considering that Far Cry 2 plays out in our very own backyard (well, more or less), we felt it appropriate to ask the game developers at Ubisoft a few pertinent questions. Some of the submissions we received from our team of whip-cracking, savvy game journalists just weren't suitable, but eventually, after tossing out idiocy about baboon spider-launcher weapons and their thoughts on us pretending to be game rangers when we go overseas, we trimmed things down to sixteen sensible questions. Louis-Pierre Pharand (Producer), Clint Hocking (Creative Director) and Dominic Guay (Technology Director) took the time to answer them. Thanks guys, your time and effort are much appreciated.

Let's start with the obvious question first. How and why was development passed from Crytek to Ubisoft?

LP: Ubisoft collaborated with Crytek on the original *Far Cry* acting as publisher of the title, soon after Ubisoft acquired all rights to the *Far Cry* licence. Three years ago, the Montreal Studio was chosen to assemble a team to develop the sequel, and here we are today!

To what extent does Ubisoft's new Dunia Engine incorporate *Far Cry*'s CryENGINE technology? Did the *Far Cry 2* team steal any of the cool stuff from the Scimitar Engine when the *Assassin's Creed* team wasn't looking? We think that climbing trees in the Serengeti would be awesome.



DG: I roughly estimate that there is less than 1% of Dunia's runtime code that comes from the original CryENGINE. Many years have gone by since the original *Far Cry* shipped, and the goals we had for *Far Cry 2* simply could not be supported by that technology. As for the *Assassin's* team, we do share ideas with them and can benefit from each other's experience in building a game engine.

Jack Carver has obviously been pushed out of a plane somewhere between Micronesia and Africa, and there's no outward sign of any angry, oversized lizards. Is there any tie-in with *Far Cry* whatsoever? What makes *Far Cry 2* a *Far Cry* game?

CH: Honestly, the things that made *Far Cry* a *Far Cry* game had very little to do with Jack Carver or mutant lizards. *Far Cry* is about survival in an exotic, beautiful but dangerous wilderness. *Far Cry 2* is the same thing, but we needed to ensure that our environment would remain exotic. Since *Far Cry*, too many players have been to too many tropical islands in games and on TV for that to be exotic anymore. Going to a dangerous tropical island is Thursday-night television. The next place that feels foreign, dangerous, beautiful and realistic is naturally central Africa.

There is increasing pressure on FPS titles to push genre boundaries and present players with something they haven't seen before. What is *Far Cry 2* doing to stand out from the crowd?

CH: Lots. I don't think that we're 'genre-bending' so much as trying to change the way story and narrative work in a game.





We believe that better cinematics and good writing alone are not what will bring game stories into the future. We believe that in order to really make players care about the story and the characters and what happens in the game, the story itself needs to be a dynamic system – the same way driving or shooting are dynamic systems. The player needs to have agency in the story. He/she needs to 'play' the story, meaning that the story needs to dynamically reconfigure itself to actions the player takes. In a game with so much shooting, what this mostly means is ensuring that the player is allowed to kill even major characters in the story and that the story will continue. Once you achieve that as a possibility, that's when you need to add the support offered by the best possible writing. However, ultimately the writing has to be in service of the player playing the story. The player should not be in service of the writer, moving the writer's plot forward.

There were complaints about the map balancing, linearity and unreasonable difficulty of end-game bosses in *Far Cry*. Has Ubisoft addressed these issues, or are gamers just a great big bunch of whiners?



whom sensible game designers should ignore?

CH: Well, game designers do need to be careful to not pay too much attention to a vocal minority on online forums, but overall I tend to agree that many games are punishingly difficult in their end-game boss battles. In my opinion, this is because games tend to focus too heavily on reflexes and not enough on decisions. Ultimately, games are not about successful input - they are about making successful decisions. Historically, however, we have always wrestled with the problem of equivalency between difficulty of input precision and difficult of decision making. Think of a difficult platformer. Often the difficulty of the decision in how to cross the lava pit is directly translated to how suddenly and precisely you need to react to make that decision. This reaches a critical threshold where the number of players able to be entertained by this decision gets smaller and smaller as the tolerance to precision becomes finer. Effectively, the game becomes 'too hard' in terms of reflexes for most humans. Imagine, however, a game where the actual decision is hard, but the input is trivially

easy. Imagine games that challenge you to make decisions about whether to save the girlfriend or the school bus full of children, but you can't save both. Now you have a hard decision. If that decision is hard enough - because you are invested deeply in the characters and the story (because the story is a dynamic system) - then the actual button pressing to accomplish one goal or the other can be rendered significantly easier, making the input-level gameplay much more accessible, but also making the resonance and meaning of the play experience much more complex, emotional and meaningful than jumping over yet another pit of bubbling lava.

Tell us about the unusual weather system, the trees, the fire and all the other marvellous stuff.

DG: When we were in early conception for the game in 2005, we brainstormed on what we thought made nature beautiful and inspiring. We quickly realised that one of the major components of walking in nature was that everything was always dancing in the wind - that there were a lot of dynamism and movement in nature. We

set our mind to be able to reproduce that in our game world. Among other things, the sky is completely dynamic: cloud formations build up and evolve, wind changes direction, grass and trees react with high fidelity to wind strengths. I should also mention that our vegetation is destructible. If a windstorm is especially strong, tree branches can break and are picked up by the wind.

Nature can also burn. You can set fire to dry grass, wooden objects or even big trees. Fire will propagate within trees, climb the branches and burn the leaves. As you would expect, the fire is picked up in the wind and starts propagating in the environment. You can set up large grass fires that eat up vegetation and objects lying in their path - unless it is raining of course. Then, while possible, it is much harder to propagate fire.

As you can see, we built systems and made sure that those systems were all linked to one another, not just to give a better immersion in the game world, but also to deliver fun gameplay.

It seems that some developers have become madly obsessed with creating ultra-realistic gaming experiences. Yet, following the enormous success of *Halo 3* - a game about as unrealistic as possible without creating some sort of spontaneous black hole in the space-time continuum - is ultra-realism really where gaming should be going? *Crysis* turned out to be rather overwhelming after all.

CH: In fact, our research and our own experience tell us that most players consider *Halo* to be a realistic game (I know... it's weird). However, what players seem to mean when they say 'realistic' is more along the lines of 'internally consistent'. The original *Far Cry* is often praised for its realism in the first third of the game and then criticised for the shattering of that realism with the introduction of the Trigens. Similarly, *Crysis* wrestled with this problem with the aliens. Ironically, because *Halo* doesn't attempt to 'surprise' the player with a big twist that changes the dynamics of the game, it is often regarded by players as being realistic where *Far Cry* was not. We have not only focused our game on the (traditionally) realistic elements featured in the opening of *Far Cry*, but we're also not going to introduce any twists that would break the internal consistency of the experience.

Guns! Tell us about the guns! Apparently, they eventually fall apart. Do any traditional African weapons feature in the game?

CH: We have over 30 guns in the game, including the usual suspects - pistols, rifles, shotguns, RPGs and SMGs - and all of them wear down over time. The player will need to gather conflict diamonds (through exploration, or as payment from the warlords for undertaking missions) and use them to purchase arms from minor arms dealers to unlock access to brand-new versions of weapons and to upgrade them. Each weapon has its own 'reliability' rating, and some weapons are quite durable and resistant to failure, while others are quite fragile and not well suited to the humid, grimy savannahs and jungles typical in the game. As for traditional African weapons, well, we don't

have any Masai spears or anything like that, but we strove as much as possible to ensure that we offered weapons that are most commonly found in African conflicts today – notably the AK-47 and the FN-FAL, both of which are widely distributed in the region for different reasons. Additionally, we have included several unusual sorts of weapons that might not be common in games, such as a dart rifle, which uses an animal sedative to instantly knock human opponents unconscious; a mortar that allows for extremely powerful long-range ‘softening’ of a location; a flare pistol, great for starting fires, but also good for signalling enemy faction reinforcements and getting the AI to fight against one another; and, of course, the flamethrower.

Apparently, you'll have to sort yourself out if you are shot up. Why didn't Ubisoft go with magical healing Amarula berries or something? And who's Marty?

CH: In fact, there is a mission in the game that involves Artemisia plants being used as a natural malaria remedy. The player not only has to sort himself/herself out when wounded, but also needs to manage his/her malaria symptoms with medicine. In one mission, one of the factions contracts the player to destroy stockpiles of dried Artemisia being used by the other faction to treat malaria in their men. Perhaps Artemisia is not the best remedy, but in a world where everyone is sick, there is no government and little or no relief is coming from outside, people will do what they can to survive. Attacking a stockpile of medicine – regardless of its relative effectiveness – is a cold-blooded way to send a message. Marty is one of the possible ‘Buddy’ characters the player can unlock and work with during the course of the game.

With all this ‘going native’ business and the obvious emphasis on survival, will you have to go hunting for food too?

CH: No, there is no requirement to eat. However, fresh food and water are in short supply whenever there is a total collapse of order. To recreate this, we decided to provide pick-ups of fresh fruits and vegetables and bottled water to restore a small amount of health.

What does *Far Cry 2*'s AI do that no other AI has done before?

DG: It's hard to say what has or has not been done before, but I can point out some things I believe we are the first to push in shooters.

We say that our AI is very systemic. By that, we mean that it is not scripted and doing the same predictable things. Instead, it does its own thing in the world and adapts to the player's action. We are certainly not the first to take this direction in developing AI. However, we provide an uncanny amount of freedom to the player in his/her tactics. Consequently, we need to provide a lot of tools and intelligence to the enemies to adapt and challenge the player.

Among other tactics, in *FC2*, the player can try to use long-range assaults – for example, using a sniper rifle. We wanted to make sure that the AI could adapt correctly to such tactics and deal with snipers and

evasive players. For example, under cover of friendly suppressive fire, a few NPCs could run from cover to cover to reach a vehicle – one guy driving, another on a mounted gun and rushing the sniping player out of his/her position while others flank him/her.

In addition, our NPCs try to help each other. For example, if one is down and wounded, some of his friends might come over to pick him up and drag him to cover to tend to his wound.

Games set in Africa are exceedingly rare. Did the recent controversy surrounding *Resident Evil 5* have *Far Cry 2*'s development team scrambling for a project reassessment? Does *Far Cry 2* attempt to offer any statement on the myriad social and economic crises endemic throughout Africa, or is it just lots of running around and shooting stuff with nice lions in the background?

CH: The *RE5* silliness was nothing more than the typical overreaction of people who don't understand our medium, and it didn't have any impact at all on what we are doing. In fact, it is exactly the rarity you mention that drew us to Africa in the first place for reasons I mentioned above. There is a serious scarcity of environments in this world that remain unexploited, fresh,

natural and able to capture the human imagination in the way sub-Saharan Africa can.

At the same time, in addition to this unique natural bounty, Africa does also bring with it a host of complex and important problems that – believe it or not – make excellent ingredients for exploring in the game's medium. Films set in Africa – such as *Tears of the Sun*, *Blood Diamond* or *Lord of War* – are often constrained to exploring only one of these problems. Trafficking in illegal arms, the trade in conflict diamonds, health crises like malaria, animal and environmental conservation, exploitation by foreign corporations of local governments, all of these problems are interconnected. A film that explores one is forced to ignore or at best caricature the others. Games have more ability to explore not only more of these problems, but also to explore how they are interconnected to each other.

Additionally, and most importantly, films (as you say) must ‘attempt to offer statements’, but making statements is not so much the domain of interactive games. We are more in the business of giving players the systems of the world to interact with so that players can ask their own questions. In many ways, interacting with a dynamic system is a way of asking



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questions. What does it mean to me when I accept conflict diamonds as payment from warlords in an unsanctioned, illegal conflict, and then use those diamonds to purchase arms? Why am I doing it? What are the effects on those around me (embodied in *Far Cry 2* by the Buddies and also by the civilians and the underground trying to protect them), and on my own conscience or my own 'soul'?

Far Cry 2 is not so didactic as to state that, "Unsanctioned factional warfare in a failed state is morally wrong." Frankly, if you don't already find this self-evident, you have deep-seated psychological and emotional issues. *Far Cry 2* instead says, "Unsanctioned factional warfare in a failed state happens" and then it goes on to ask, "How do you feel about that?" With any luck, and if we do our jobs well, *Far Cry 2* can de-trivialise these issues so that people can better understand them and see the complexities that make finding solutions so challenging.

There are reportedly around 12 characters to choose. Does your selection have any tangible impact on gameplay, or is it a purely superficial thing?

CH: There are 13 'Buddies' in the game. Ten are male and three are female. You choose your avatar from one of the ten male characters. For technical reasons having to do with first-person animation skeletons and with localisation of dialogue, we elected to not allow the player to choose a female avatar. The Buddies are not differentiated by 'stats' or their weapons or equipment. They all, however, offer different optional ways to engage the 'main' missions of the game, each offering their own perspective and flavour to the mission. Additionally, each Buddy has his/her own small set of side missions that he or she can send you on. Therefore, in a sense, the avatar you choose is effectively 'eliminating' story possibilities from each player's unique experience. If you choose Marty Alancar as your avatar, you will obviously not meet Marty Alancar in the game. You will not do any optional versions of the main missions with Marty, nor will you do any of Marty's unique side missions. However, you'll be certain to hear stories from your friends who chose

a different avatar about how Marty saved them, or about how they worked with Marty to double-cross one of the warlords. Or even of how Marty died...

If all these other mercenaries are just sort of hanging around, is there actually a top-secret plan to include co-op play?

LP: We are putting all of our efforts into offering a completely new FPS experience that includes a 50km² world, 24-hour day-night cycle, propagation of fire and a weather system including rain and storms.

The stunning graphics available on PC and console will make it the most immersive experience on the market. The player will experience what real freedom of choice is in a shooter.

The open world and all the tools we are giving the player enable him/her to completely choose how he or she wants to play.

We have decided that whatever is included in the game needs to be of the highest quality. To achieve a compelling co-op experience would have been impossible considering what the game will offer.

We have to keep some surprises for *Far Cry 3*.

The game was initially scheduled for a PC-exclusive release. Why the change in plans? Are there any significant differences between the versions?

LP: With the mandate for *Far Cry 2* came another one: Build the new, innovative engine for the company. The Dunia Engine was born!

The engine needs to serve future projects, therefore the need to be ported to the 360 and PS3. Back in September, the Dunia Console Team ported the game to the 360 and PS3 to validate the technology.

We were more than surprised with the results. We decided to investigate if it would be possible to port the entire game without compromises and we wanted to make sure that it would not be detrimental to the PC game.

Thanks to a great 'f?*!@#\$' team, gamers will enjoy the same amazing experience on all platforms.

Any plans for DLC later on?

LP: Yes. **NAG**

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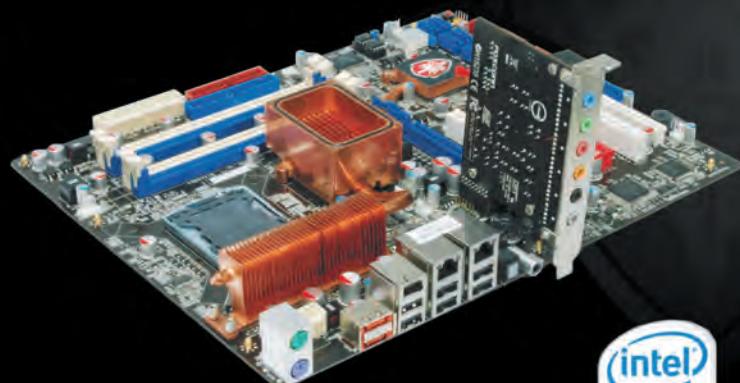
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FAR CRY 2

*Karibuni kwa Afrika
ya Katikati**

THE ORIGINAL *FAR CRY* was a big deal. Not only did it have rather juicy graphics, but it also had an awesome story and a big (and very pretty) island with mutants to shoot. While it hardly revolutionised the way first-person shooters were played, it did give developers a few exciting new toys to play with. And if there's one development studio that likes its toys, it's Ubisoft's icy wasteland division, Ubisoft Montreal.

Not satisfied with the original Crytek Engine's ability to keep up with the times, Ubisoft Montreal decided some two years ago to build a new engine almost from scratch for *Far Cry 2*. This time around, Ubisoft Montreal promises tons of choices, a massive African savannah

to explore and more realism than you can shake a Baobab branch at.

After selecting a character from a pool of ten mercenaries, the player will be thrust head first into the barren heart of Africa. Your mission: bring peace to a war-torn nation by killing The Jackal, a good-for-nothing arms dealer who's only too happy to fuel the fight between two rival military factions. Hard-ass, save-the-day attitude. Check. Poor, Third World nation in need of a hero. Check. Malaria tablets... damn!

Players will find themselves in trouble right from the start, by contracting malaria almost as soon as they arrive in the dusty motherland. This annoying little disease has the habit of killing millions each year, and requires constant medical attention to be kept under control – which becomes a major driving force behind the player's choices. Expect plenty on your plate other than a little parasitic disease. Patrick Redding, Lead Story Designer behind this African jaunt, is creating a story (and story mechanic) that will be both captivating and

open ended at the same time.

You'll make friends with the local group of peacekeepers who call themselves the "Grassroots Intelligence Network." This group of well-connected tree huggers will be only too happy to hand over some much-needed malaria medication, provided that you stay on the right side of the law. However, as most gamers know, keeping the peace is seldom as fun as wrecking it. Before you know it, you'll be serving up lead sandwiches to various bigwigs in the warring factions, and will eventually have your filthy, scruffy security blanket taken away.

Be prepared to be kept on your toes during combat. Players can expect to be flanked, ambushed and fled from, depending on how the rather unpredictable AI assesses the situation. Patrols and guards are almost never the same, and will adjust their behaviour according to the player's actions in the game world, the time of day or their desire for a quick snack. Dynamic AI such as this is out to prove one point. According



A COMPLETELY NEW WORLD

The new engine, elegantly named *Dunia* (meaning "world" in Swahili), will see players not only fighting the aggressive and diverse AI, but also an unforgiving weather system, complete with volumetric wind, a day-night cycle, realistic cloud formations and troublesome veld fires. Fire and smoke will play a large role in both defence and offence, so expect the need to pat flames off yourself a couple of times before realising that standing downwind from your recently commissioned conflagration is a poor idea.



to producer Louis-Pierre Pharand, no two encounters will feel the same.

If you're the type who enjoys a detailed, sprawling heads-up display, you'd better get cracking on those modding skills, because *Far Cry 2* doesn't like you. You'll have access to two basic HUD elements: health and ammunition. Everything else, from compass heading and map location to mission objectives and wind direction (keep reading, that wasn't a typo) will be fully integrated into the gameplay through those magical things called hands. Juggling a poorly scrawled map while cruising in the savannah at 80km/h plus in your falling-apart Jeep will be commonplace, and popping out your anemometer just before you launch a smouldering stream of fuel at the nearest thatch hut will become an art form before you know it.

With all that nonsense going on in the background, players will still have to pay attention to the expectedly vast array of weapons and realistically destructible

buildings. The trustworthy AK-47, combat shotgun, RPG-7 and other weapons will take damage and could jam in the middle of a firefight. Vehicles could break down at the most inconvenient times, sometimes requiring repairs before you can make that critical getaway.

If the single-player campaign doesn't sound like it will fulfil your FPS needs, look forward to a large community of map makers, as all three platform releases will include a powerful map editor, which will likely elevate the 16-player multiplayer to stardom. Although multiplayer doesn't seem as if it'll be quite as innovative as the single-player campaign, there'll be plenty to keep willing players interested. Combatants will be able to choose from a variety of classes, become obsessed with the persistent awards system, and drive over their friends in a multitude of gameplay types. Just don't expect any online co-op.

NAG

Geoff Burrows

AFRICAN POTATOES

The health system might leave some players feeling a little squeamish, but it'll definitely push the combat pace up a notch or two. Players who take too much damage in battle will need to bail out of the action and find cover to administer some truly African-inspired first aid. Whether it's digging bullets out of thighs, hands or elbows, or yanking free a tree branch from an apparently not-that-important part of the lower torso, players can expect to be entertained by over 60 such animations. Take too much damage without getting a chance to heal, however, and you go down hard – but not all is lost. If you've been nice enough to the other 11 mercenaries who weren't chosen, then chances are that you'll end up fighting side by side with a few of them. Having an NPC buddy with whom to share the stage is essential to revive and re-arm should a critical wound befall the player.



EXPERIENCE THE BUSH, SEE THE WILDLIFE AND SHOOT SOME AFRICANS...

BEFORE GETTING SOME ONE-ON-ONE time with the actual game at a recent event in Paris, we sat in on a Q&A session with Clint Hawking (creative director) talking about *Far Cry 2*. Here's a very quick summary of some of the stuff you probably don't know about yet...

The game world is dynamic and depending on where and when you kill bad guys, the story will adapt and play out differently to fit into the reality you've just created. This philosophy kicks into play as soon as you select which mercenary avatar you'd like to represent in the game world, because then (obviously) you won't be running across that mercenary when you play the game. It's also interesting to note that the content writer for *Far Cry 2* also wrote the content for *BioShock*. *Far Cry 2* is clearly designed to be immersive. For example, to look at the map you don't pause and flip through a menu system - you press F5 and no matter what you're doing at the time (standing under a tree, in the middle of a firefight or even while driving), the map and compass will open and dominate your view. The aim of this is to maintain the

suspension of disbelief while playing. In terms of the environment, the game will play out across two 25km² areas. The second half will unlock around a third of the way into the game, and is separated by a desert area. Although many gaming news sites have reported that the game would not load while you play, it was offhandedly mentioned in the Q&A session that they still had to determine if a dump and load would be necessary to access the other half of the playable area. Next up, a girl's best friend... Diamonds are the currency in *Far Cry 2*. You are paid in diamonds and you can find diamonds in the African bush - if you know where to look (hint: the compass flashes green when diamonds are near). Diamonds buy new weapons, so you'll want a lot of them. There will also be a day-night cycle and apparently, muzzle flashes in the dark will either help or hinder you. Clint also stressed that there will be no science-fiction content, no mutants, no creatures (other than African creatures), no teleportation and no time travel. And that's that for the Q&A.



**EXCLUSIVE
HANDS-ON
WITH FAR
CRY 2 AT
UBIDAYS
2008 IN
PARIS,
FRANCE**

HANDS ON

Crammed inside a small area that looked like a tin shack from somewhere in Africa, with a twitchy mouse, heat beating down and an audience of fellow South African colleagues passing rude comments about how badly I was doing, I was ready for my first hands-on go at *Far Cry 2*.

The action began somewhere in the African bush... (You can tell if you live in Africa - it's just something about the way the grass grows and the sporadic clumping of thorn trees, rocks and bushes.) I immediately had to approach a guarded lookout point. The location was high above my current hiding place, but there was only one guard. I pressed F5 to access my field map. Once the map was open, I clicked on the right button to pull up a field scope, which in a similar fashion to *Far Cry*'s binoculars marked the location of the sniper who then appeared on the map - useful when planning an attack. (There is no 'radar' in *Far Cry 2*, so enemies won't be continuously highlighted for easy pickings. This means that you'll



have to fight honestly for a change.) Anyway, I highlighted the guard and proceeded to close in for the kill. My weapons at that point included a Desert Eagle and an automatic rifle. Naturally, I pulled out the hand cannon and dispatched the guard... boom, boom - dead easy. In the lookout, I found a grenade launcher, a shotgun and a flamethrower! Now it was time for the main assault on the base. Choosing a weapon was hard considering the options, but I settled for the most destructive one. It was a good choice. The grenade launcher took out three of the bad guys immediately, but also put the rest of the base on alert. I then set fire to the grass on the right of the base with the flamethrower (and incinerated one bad guy in the process) to prevent any attack from that direction and as a secondary option to hide my movements. Now I was well into the base, between buildings and popping off rounds with the Desert Eagle. I could sense that the sceptical crowd behind me was secretly impressed with my multiple headshots, and even the demonstration

dude was nodding his head in approval (but he gets paid to do that). Now only one bad guy remained... far off and inside a tower, firing rockets at the base and me. All around me, huge explosions were going off as his rockets hit piles of ammunition and barrels of fuel. If I didn't take him out soon I wouldn't make it. I ran towards a dune buggy and drove towards his position, steering wildly left and right to avoid the incoming rocket fire. Like an idiot, I ended up parking too far away and got stuck in the rocks. The next rocket found its target and I was dead - the stifled laughter behind me wasn't helping my mood.

The sequence above was just an early assault on a base; it went off perfectly and proved that the core game experience was working very well. The action was frantic, it was tricky to kill some of the bad guys, the flamethrower worked beautifully and the short driving bit felt solid.

Recently, I read somewhere that game journalists should always write what they think and not what they're supposed to

think, thanks to all the endless hype. So, what do I think about *Far Cry 2*? I think it's more like *Crysis* than many people will admit, but without the science fiction and sneaking around bits. *Far Cry 2* is set in Africa, so that's a big plus, and much of the in-game decorations are procedurally created, so they look natural - African natural if you will. The rivers are muddy brown and the tin shacks seem cobbled together in the right way. From a graphical authenticity point of view, the 'feel' is spot on. Playing through the short hands-on sequence at Ubisoft's event in Paris was a satisfyingly experience that left me wanting more. In terms of background relevancy, I'm a big fan of first-person shooters and loved *Crysis*. *Half-Life 2* is my current all-time favourite FPS, so take that where it comes from. There's no doubt that *Far Cry 2* is going to be a cracking good game and looks like it's going to bring enough new stuff to the table to differentiate it from the rest. **NAG**

Michael James

WHAT WE
WANT



PRINCE OF PERSIA

Okay, so there is a Bruckheimer movie based on *Sands of Time* in production, a next-gen reboot game coming in hot with a cell-shaded look, a new Disney movie based on *Sands of Time* and a new game based on the Disney movie. It's getting confusing, yet appealing.

RAYMAN RAVING RABBIDS 3

You sit on a moose and slide down an icy slope. Using only the power of your left and right butt cheeks, you steer that moose. You make it home. You score high. You are rabbid. Raving rabbid. Suddenly, the Wii Balance Board has a use.

FAR CRY 2

We're bored of shooting stuff with generic urban or temperate forest backdrops. We want lions, giraffes and cobras leaping across the sun-soaked Serengeti in the distance, while we blow up paramilitary installations and cripple illegitimate Third World economies. It's all about the ambiance.

STREET FIGHTER IV

It's been over a decade since *Street Fighter III*, and with the 20th anniversary of the franchise just around the corner, what better way to celebrate syndicated roadside brawling with another rubbish movie and a multi-platform game release? Actually, we just really want to see Blanka in HD.

LEGO INDIANA JONES

Somebody with a massively bloated brain decided to take two of the coolest things in the world ever (LEGO and *Indiana Jones*) and put them together. We smell a Nobel nomination. Thank Odin for smart people. In the meantime, we just really, really, really want to swing a LEGO bullwhip.



SIMCITY CREATOR

Developer→ Electronic Arts | Publisher→ Electronic Arts | Genre→ Management | Release Date→ September

IT SEEMS THAT THE environmentally conscious SimCity Societies just didn't offer the hearty broth that returning SimCity fans were craving, so here we have SimCity Creator. Electronic Arts is promising us "an open-ended, highly creative game with a sense of humour that allows players to utilise the distinctive gameplay aspects of the Wii and Nintendo DS to create, enjoy and destroy epic cities." Sounds good!

It sounds like classic SimCity. You start by zoning your city and the zones blossom into homes, factories, businesses and transport. There is an entirely new interface designed to take advantage of the Wii Remote, so you can sit back and be a couch-

mayor. Cities come in a variety of flavours, such as American styled, European or Asian, with thirteen city styles in total. You'll also have access to 30 'Hero' buildings, themed after historic monuments or fantasy, which will affect your city in a variety of ways. Roads and rail can now be made curvy (goodbye grid-central) and for a bird's-eye view, you can fly a helicopter, jet or plane over the city.

Disasters are back, allowing you to cause earthquakes, tornadoes or call in robots and monsters to trash your finely constructed metropolis. And if all else fails, you can set fire to the whole thing by waving your Wii Remote around like it's a flamethrower. **NAG**

ALL NAG CONSOLE PREVIEWS AND REVIEWS ARE VISUALISED USING THE SAMSUNG LA46M81B LCD TV

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CALL OF DUTY 5: WORLD AT WAR

IT'S A WARM DAY outside. All around, there are people going about their daily lives, but you're not one of them. You're lying in a dark sport, next to some rubble, waiting for the enemy to run past. This time you were careful though. You planted claymores in close proximity to the entrance points of your location. The sound of gunshots in the distance make you feel safe... but only for a second. Suddenly, you hear a faint click. The adrenalin starts pumping because you know what's about to happen... a loud explosion! Your claymore saved you this time, but now the enemy knows that you're hiding nearby. This quickly becomes evident when you find yourself unable to pinpoint the location of that distinct, grenade-bouncing-on-concrete sound. You quickly switch to your assault rifle, but it's too late. The kill

camera reveals a dead-accurate sniper shot from 500m away.

If that didn't stir up deep emotions, then you're certainly not part of the elite few who brave the battlefield every night. There is no shortage of first-person war shooters today, and fortunately we have some pretty kick-ass titles to choose from. Currently, the favourites at NAG are *COD4* and the legendary *Battlefield 2*. But let's be honest: war shooters have become somewhat boring.

Granted, *COD4* is one of the best, but the truth is that all WWII and modern warfare shooters over the last few years have become a little bland. The plots are usually all based on the same historic events. It's generally the Allies versus the Axis, and the weapons and vehicles are much the same. (I know. I am generalising, but you get the idea.) We are definitely ready for something

HOLD STILL! There's a spider on your shirt!



new. *COD4* gave us that hope. So, when Activision announced that Treyarch would be developing *COD5*, fans of the popular *COD4* were less than thrilled. We even had a few heated debates about this decision. However, who can blame us? After the *Call of Duty 3* situation, Treyarch Studios left a bit of a sour taste with fans of the franchise.

We were eager to find out what Treyarch's plans were for the fifth game. Therefore, in true NAG fashion, we hopped on a plane, sat in economy class for 21 hours (one way), and asked the developers ourselves. During our tour of the studio, we saw and heard some interesting things: the sort of stuff that will certainly make *COD4* players feel like kids in a candy store again.

The team working on this project is the Grey Matter Interactive team that worked on *Call of Duty: United Offence* - the expansion pack to the original *Call of Duty* - and some other WWII games. During our morning briefing, a representative from Treyarch said that there are too many modern warfare games out there, which is why they wanted to go back to WWII and

redefine the experience for gamers. Their first step in this direction is the locale they are using. *COD5* (*Call of Duty 5: World at War*) takes place during the final months of the war in the Pacific. What made the PTO (Pacific Theater Operations) so different from the rest of the war, was the enemy that the Allies encountered. Lt. Colonel Hank Keirsey (Ret.), military consultant to Infinity Ward since the first *Call of Duty*, told us a few shocking war stories about the kind of war that was fought in the PTO. "The enemy then was the Imperial Japanese. They had a different belief system, and they used the environment in ways we had not seen before. The enemy would feign death, crawl out of spider holes, and hide in trees for days." The latter is certainly something you will encounter in the game. As Keirsey further explained, *COD5* will take on a harsher and grittier tone, more so than any *COD* game before it. This is to add to the intensity of the game and it's a part of history they feel strongly about sharing with the world. Treyarch put in an impressive amount of effort to ensure the

authenticity of every detail within the game. They even tracked down the First Marine Division veterans and talked to them about the tactics of the war - things they eventually incorporated into the game. Keirsey also mentioned how the veterans still couldn't talk about some of the horror stories they experienced.

COD5 is built on the *COD4* Engine, but Treyarch has spent a lot of time tweaking the engine and adding a few extra bits to give *COD5* something more than just tweaked graphics and new plot lines. One of the biggest new additions to the engine is co-op mode. Yes, PC and console gamers can now enjoy co-op play with friends on the same platform.

You will be able to jump into any of the co-op levels to improve on your experience points and unlock co-op-specific challenges, which you can use to unlock weapons and perks for your multiplayer battles. Co-op play will also be scaled for difficulty. This means that the game will be able to detect the players' experience levels, look at the amount of people in the

game, and then up the difficulty accordingly. Rick Fairly, the Creative Lead on *COD5*, said that the difficulty level would not just affect the hit points, but that the enemy would also behave differently. So, in theory, playing a co-op map with different people will change your experience in that game enough for you to want to play it again with a different group of people. You can have up to four people in a team. On console, you can do this in split-screen, but on the PC, for obvious reasons, you will only be able to play co-op over the Internet.

The PTO also brought with it the need for new weapons. Fire-based weapons seemed to be the most popular, and this time, *COD5* will see one of the most feared weapons ever to grace your gaming screen and the front lines: the flamethrower. It was used to great effect in WWII and the developers were quick to add it to the weapons list. More than merely burning your enemy to a toasty rasher (sizzling sound effects free for a limited time only), the flamethrower will alter the environment. It was hinted but not confirmed that the multiplayer mode will allow players to use trees as vantage points for sniping or hiding. If that is the case, then a player with a flamethrower will be able to burn down the tree, thus destroying the vantage point and killing anyone unfortunate enough to be hiding up there. A word of

warning though: if you're the guy carrying the 40kg backpack containing the liquid fuel, make sure you have covering fire. Those babies have a nasty habit of starting the party early... if you know what we mean.

Treyarch representatives also mentioned that *COD5* will feature vehicles, but they were vague about the details. From the game footage we saw, it seems as if jeeps and tanks would be up for grabs on the battlefield. There is also an entire level where you sit in a PBY-5 Catalina rescue plane, snug behind your .50-calibre machine gun, ripping up Japanese fighters. They also mentioned that in this level, and a few others, the player would be faced with a decision. For example, in the Catalina level, at one point you will have to choose whether you are defending against the attacking enemy or if you are going to rescue the survivors in the water. Treyarch's representative said that your decision would affect the outcome of the game, but was not prepared to comment more on the subject. We think it's a potentially great idea if it's implemented properly.

The most interesting part of the tour was undoubtedly the sound studio. Brian Tuey, the Audio Lead for *COD5*, spoke about the huge sound investment they had made, and by the looks of the sound studio, it was a pretty huge investment. Treyarch wants





to make *COD5* the best sounding game out there and it seems as if they could claim that honour. While most games feature a stereo track for the environmental sounds, the guys who work on the sound for this game created an innovative method of mapping each ambient sound to a location on the map. This comes into effect when the player approaches these locations: the sound will stay put, but the audio will move around as you move, resulting in some pretty accurate environmental sounds. The music design also features a few new tricks. The developers didn't want to follow the traditional, big-war ballad route. Instead, they tweaked the audio of the *COD4* Engine to bring you an event-based score. The music has also been changed from heavy orchestral tunes to something a little more modern, but with strong WWII undertones.

As we walked through a cluster of Beta testers, we noticed that Treyarch had included some night-time maps in *COD5*.

From what we have seen, it looks rather good, but unfortunately, they gave us no hands-on time. Other interesting new additions include new particle effects that are evident when you set something alight. We expressed our concerns about system requirements for the PC, but were assured that this wouldn't be another *Crysis*. It's clear that the developers are giving the PC a lot of love. Mod tools and mod-tool support will form a big part of the new *COD* game. Treyarch also mentioned that they would have servers available that will allow gamers to host multiplayer games, much as they do with the console. One person sets the parameters and he or she can then create an open game or invite some friends for a private game. This will work great for the mod community.

Online players will appreciate the new play zones and engagement distances, which ensure that you're never more than five seconds away from a battle. The multiplayer

version of *COD5* will also feature improved squad capabilities. There is talk of allowing squad leaders to use waypoints and the ability to communicate to only your squad. Treyarch mentioned that squad leaders of successful squads will be rewarded, but they refused to comment any more.

From the game footage we have seen, the behind-the-scenes tour, and the peeks at the Beta-tester screens, it's safe to say that *COD5* will be an excellent game. *COD4* players can rest assured that *COD5* has not changed much: it's now a little slicker and environments look absolutely stunning. Therefore, the chances of this turning into another *COD3* are slim to none. As die-hard *Call of Duty* 4 fans, we are very excited about this one. While the single-player mode will be a lot of fun, the multiplayer modes, including the mod support, will give the *COD* franchise the potential to capture the attention of many new gamers.

NAG
Regardt van der Berg

NOTICE

Dear Citizen,

This is the city. See how nice and clean the city is. There is no crime in the city, either. Well, actually, there's not much of anything going on in the city because WE'RE WATCHING YOU ALL THE TIME, CITIZEN, AND THE FIRST PERSON TO DO ANYTHING EVEN REMOTELY UNCONVENTIONAL IS GOING TO BE SUMMARILY ABSTRACTED* FROM OUR NICE, CLEAN, CRIME-FREE CITY BY OUR ACCREDITED ABSTRACTION AGENTS.

Obedient conformism, citizen. It's not the right choice, it's the only choice.

Thanking you in advance for your obedient conformism, Your friendly neighbourhood totalitarian regime.

* Abstraction may include permanent and irreversible termination of personal somatic functions, including (but not limited to) in- and outward respiratory operation.

MIRROR'S EDGE

You are Faith, and you're just not into this obedient conformism nonsense, not least of all because your parents were battered to death by the police during a protest and now your sister's just been kidnapped. Therefore, you're doing your bit for dissension by scurrying around the city's rooftops, couriering top-secret missives between the city's rebel alliances. One day, you'll buy yourself an X-Wing and just shoot everything with lasers instead. Fortunately enough, you have all these posh parkour skills and some sort of mysterious benefactor named Mercury to get you around in the meantime.

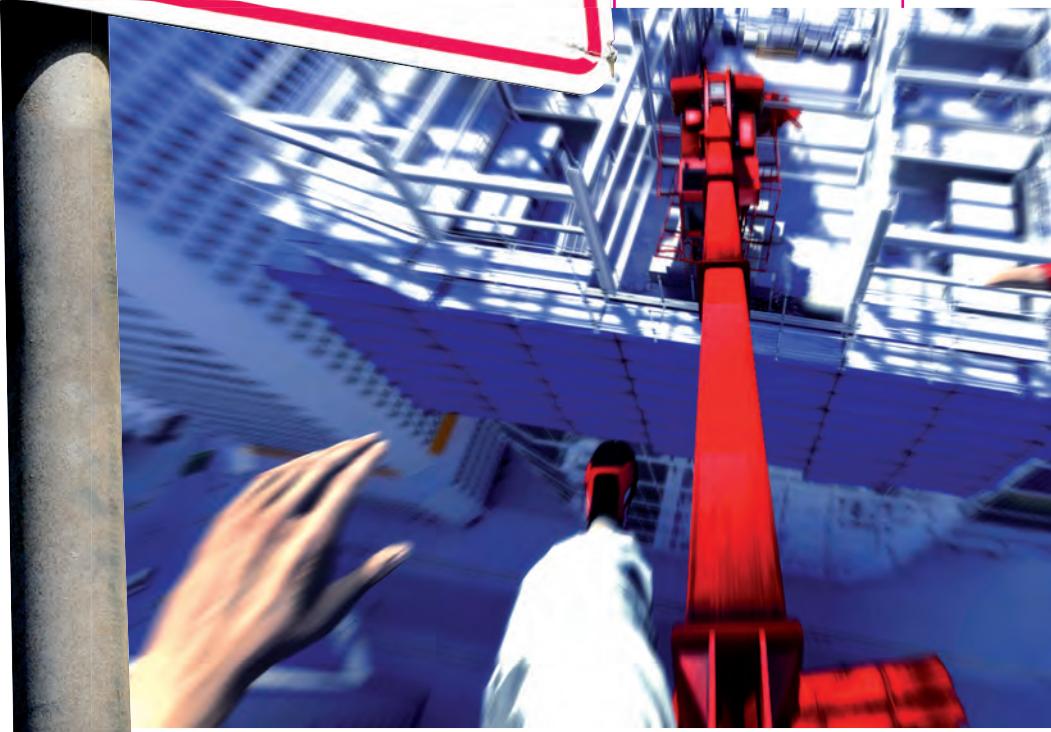
Tarryn van der Byl



THE LEAP OF FAITH

Ever since James Bond ran down some sort of bomb-peddling rascal through a dizzying gauntlet in Madagascar, the world has been thoroughly captivated by the urban thrills and spills of parkour. Originally developed in France during the '70s, parkour is a rigorous athletic discipline described by its architect, David Belle, as "getting over all the obstacles in your path as you would in an emergency. You want to move in such a way, with any movement, as to help you gain the most ground on someone or something, whether escaping from it or chasing toward it."

Conveniently enough, the city of *Mirror's Edge* is crammed with all the paraphernalia of a textbook parkour environment, including girders, cranes, pipes, ramps, scaffolds and zip lines.





SEEING RED

Despite using the Unreal Engine 3, *Mirror's Edge* has an immediately distinctive visual aesthetic in bold defiance of the recent trend towards grimy, sullen *Gears of War* clones. Can you identify what's missing from all the screenshots on this page? There's no green whatsoever in the colour palette, otherwise almost entirely dominated by white and blue. Somewhat reminiscent of the laboratory areas of *Portal*, the result is a cold, bleak sterility that looks like it smells of formaldehyde. Even the brightly ubiquitous sunlight looks about as warm as a dead fish. DICE's own proprietary Beast Lighting Engine was used alongside UE3 to facilitate the additional bouncing and reflection of colours, further enhancing this unusual

feature. Not only does all this colour manipulation serve as a potent ambient setting, but it's also an indicator of the player's overall health: as you take damage, the colour around you will begin to bleed out and desaturate.

In striking contrast, however, the game's "Runner's Vision" will highlight navigable environmental pieces in bright red as you approach them, marking potential escape routes. "Basically," says Senior Producer Owen O'Brien, "when you move through this game very fast, we wanted the player to be able to understand very quickly when or where they could go or should go." This aid will gradually reduce as the game progresses, until only the final destination is highlighted.



I'LL TAKE THAT

Okay, so this parkour stuff is cool, but sometimes you just want to stuff bullets into eyes. Should you prefer a more confrontational approach, it's possible to disarm assailants and sequester their firearms for your own purposes. Ammunition is limited, however, and your weapons will be discarded once the clips are empty. Lugging artillery around is only going to slow you down, anyway. You never see squirrels packing shotguns.



NEVER MIND THE ACROPHOBIA...

It's not something you hear much in gaming circles because it's so desperately not hardcore, but many gamers secretly suffer with something called simulation sickness. More or less the virtual equivalent of motion sickness, symptoms are largely confined to overwhelming nausea while playing free-camera first-person shooters. I can now publicly out myself as one of these *miserables* – I missed the first generation of first-person shooters after *Hexen*'s plunging view bob jostled a recently digested lunch back out of my face.

In order to avoid this almost certain doom in a game with no HUD and a dramatically unstable camera that rolls when you somersault, a small reticule has been placed in the centre of the screen as a focal point, while the field of view has been widened to reduce disorientation.

LIVING ON THE EDGE

The city depicted in the game remains deliberately nameless, because as O'Brien explains, "It's nowhere and it's everywhere. It's an amalgamation of lots of different cities. And it's an amalgamation of lots of different things that are happening around the world."

With its scrubbed, sanitary facades and surveillance infrastructures, this metropolis is also the game's titular mirror. Disaffected and oppressed, Faith and her separatist chums live out on the periphery of society, out on the mirror's edge. Isn't this metaphor stuff clever?



THE BOURNE CONSPIRACY

THE MONSTROUS TRUTH, I must confess, is that I've not seen any of the *Bourne* films, despite no paucity of earnest recommendations from friends. This is mostly due to a largely unreasonable, but nonetheless potent hatred of Matt Damon. So I imagine some of this "Oh cool, it's Jason Bourne" nonsense is somewhat lost on me*. At least they've not used Damon's likeness in the game.

Anyway, Jason Bourne is a former agent for a CIA black-ops programme dubbed "Operation Treadstone," a \$30-million occupation which more or less cost him his real identity (RIP, David Webb), although he totally scored some high-tech, ninja-assassin spy skills as a trade in. Following a crisis of conscience and the consequent failure to assassinate deposed African dictator, Nykwanja Wombosi, Bourne was professionally disgraced and set upon

by his erstwhile employers. To further complicate matters, he also found himself the wretched victim of retrograde amnesia, a conveniently marketable inconvenience that managed to chug out six novels, three feature films, and now a videogame by occasionally offering itty-bitty, tantalising nuggets of Jason's lost memory. *The Bourne Conspiracy* now reveals the story behind the botched assassination, and follows the subsequent events of the film, *The Bourne Identity*. Well, awesome. Who doesn't want to pretend to be a high-tech, ninja-assassin spy for a few hours?

The result is an Unreal Engine 3-powered third-person action adventure, with visceral hand-to-hand combat, exhilarating gunplay, and all sorts of other high-tech, ninja-assassin spy stuff. Well, that's what someone managed to convince the investors, anyway. Meanwhile, back in the real world,

The Bourne Conspiracy is a sort of nice but rather humdrum brawler with abysmal shooting mechanisms, some visionary voodoo called Bourne Instinct (that's actually really almost entirely useless), and far too many of those quick-time events that are all the rage these days. What's up with those, anyway? Back in the good old days, we had to pelt down a corridor and slither under the rapidly descending security gate with a complicated three-tiered combo matrix, expertly timed to avoid the spike trap that was always there somewhere. Now you just turn a corner and quickly press A repeatedly until you win the game.

Ultimately, it's not yet looking irredeemably awful, but I think that between *Assassin's Creed* and every shooter out there, this has been done much better already.

NAG

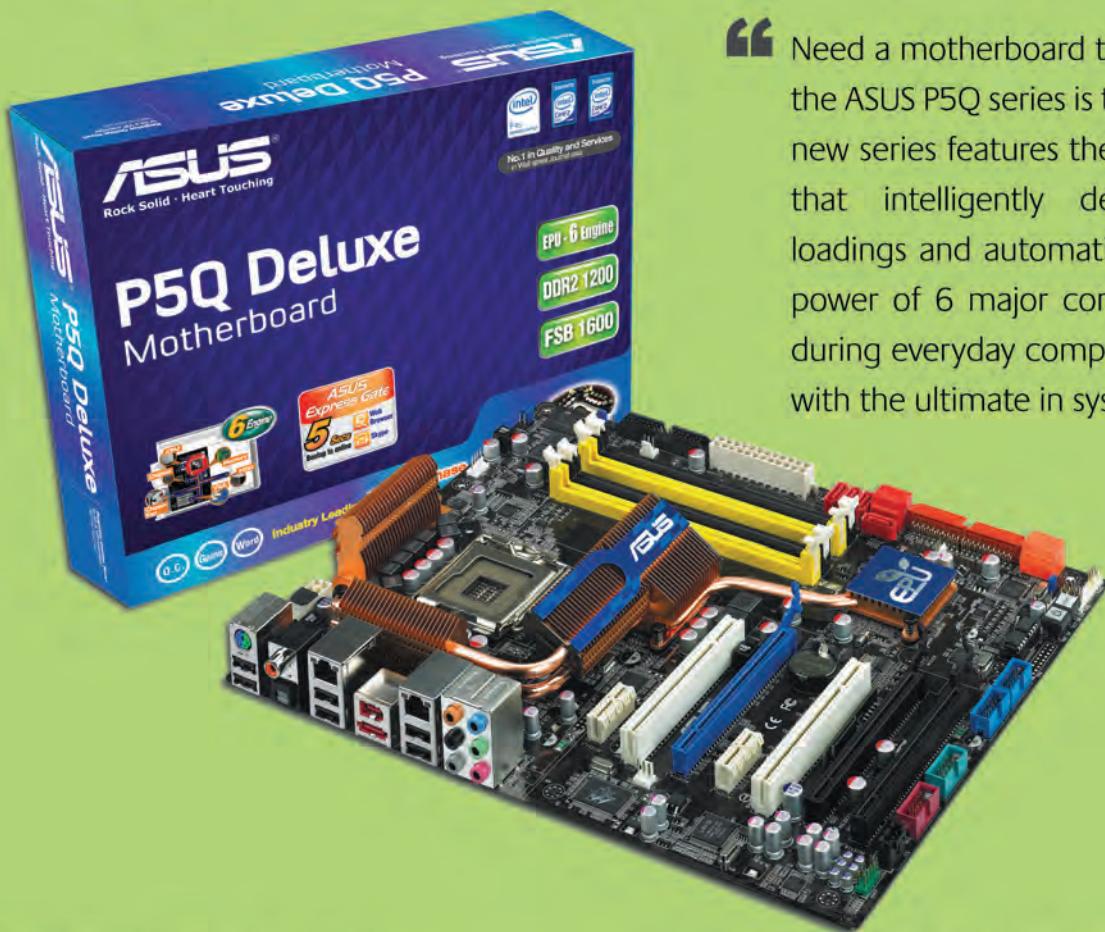
Tarryn van der Byl

*This is what makes you perfect for this preview. Ed.



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*Energy Saving performance might vary with different graphics solutions.

ONE ORDER OF SNAKE OIL

TO GO

EVERYTHING YOU WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT METAL GEAR

There is only one videogame franchise in which the right arm of your mortal enemy can hound you from beyond the grave and in which the hero saves the world using only his fists and a packet of smokes.

ALL YOU NEED IS LOVE (ON THE BATTLEFIELD)

The *Metal Gear* franchise is unmistakably distinct and unique, its popularity often not understood. (A failure to communicate or something lost in translation?)

If you don't know squat about *Metal Gear* and/or you're curious to know what the fuss is about, then you're in luck. This is the most concise guide to *Metal Gear* you'll ever read with as few commas as possible.

MUCH ADD ABOUT KOJIMA

In a final attempt to save his career in the late '80s, young game designer Hideo Kojima proposed an idea that flew smack in the face of convention. Let players use stealth to save the world in addition to using their incredible virtual gonads of steel. A genre was plucked out of thin air.

DON'T BE SCARED BY THE TONE OF MY VOICE

Separate the content from the container and you get the main themes found in all the games: pacifism, the futility of war, nuclear deterrence being a fallacy and what war does to kids. *Metal Gear* covered the manipulation of soldiers by politicians and introduced the concept of a country without politics. *Metal Gear 2* integrated political intrigue, battlefield ethics and military history. Not quite *Mario Bros*. From here, it only got more 'far out',



depending on your personal delimitations.

Metal Gear Solid dealt with the moral implications of genetic engineering. *Metal Gear Solid 2* was about how identity could be shaped by the philosophies of your own society. *Metal Gear Solid 3* showed how the time and place you live in affects your identity and how politics change as time goes by. So, genes, memes and scenes in a literal sense. Heavy stuff usually reserved for the far right of the adventure genre.



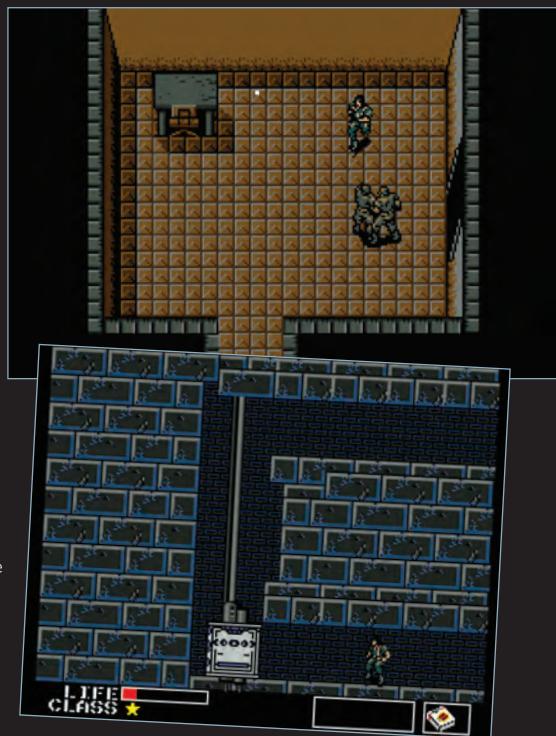
METAL GEAR

YEAR: 1987 / PLATFORM: MSX2, NINTENDO ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM

IN 1995, ABOUT 200KM north of the fictional town of Galzburg in South Africa, in Outer Heaven, a fortified state founded by a 'legendary mercenary' in the late 1980s, a weapon of mass destruction was being developed. It was during the Cold War, so the United States and Soviet Union were all tense and neither wanted anyone else to have nukes. The USA sent in its special-forces squad FOXHOUND, but contact was lost with one operative, Gray Fox, who had managed to infiltrate the Outer Heaven stronghold. So, you, Solid Snake, the rookie is sent in.

TRUE MANLY ACTION

Solid Snake was very capable especially considering his age, so saving the world using smokes and fists wasn't that farfetched. *Metal Gear* also introduced many new concepts to videogaming long before most developers thought that the technology was ready. Later titles in the series would continue to capitalise on these concepts while other developers attempted to imitate them.



HOT GAMES AT THE TIME

Bubble Bobble; Leisure Suit Larry in the Land of the Lounge Lizards; After Burner; Beyond Zork; Police Quest; Space Quest II: Vohaul's Revenge; Maniac Mansion; California Games; Might and Magic; Test Drive; The Last Ninja; Elevator Action; Bomberman; Skate or Die; Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles.

IMITATION IS FLATTERY

If the guy on the box looks familiar, that's because it's actor Michael Biehn - Kyle Reese in *The Terminator* (1984). In the early '80s, videogame box art was often 'inspired' by actors.

PLAYING IT NOW

To play the original version, you'll have to get hold of an actual MSX2 and an original game cartridge. Another way to play the game would be to get *Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence* for the PlayStation 2, which includes the expanded mobile-phone version of *Metal Gear*. For emulation of the original MSX2 version or the slightly below-par, although more colourful Nintendo Entertainment System port, head over to www.zophar.net/msx.html.

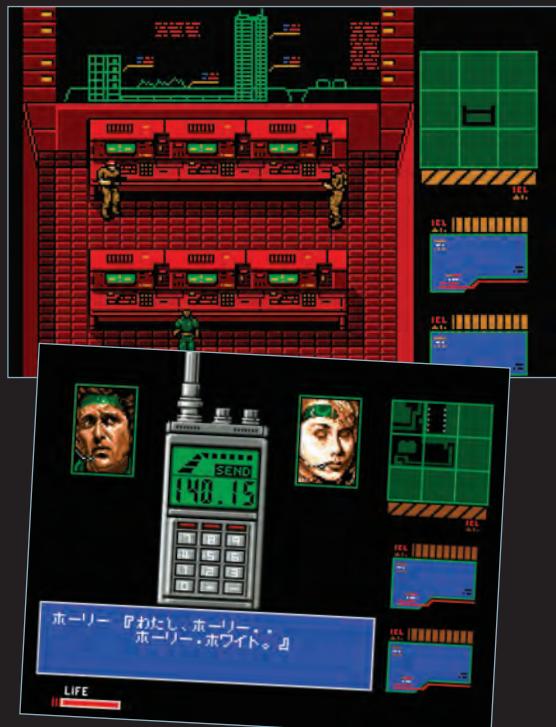
METAL GEAR 2: SOLID SNAKE

YEAR: 1990 / PLATFORM: MSX2

LET'S ASSUME THAT YOU played *Metal Gear* and led Solid Snake all the way to victory and enjoyed it. It's 1999, the Cold War is over and the twenty-first century is looking good. In the game, Solid Snake must infiltrate Zanzibar Land, a heavily defended territory. Snake's mission is to rescue the kidnapped scientist Dr Kio Marv, who has created bacteria that secrete artificial petroleum.

WE HAVE THE TECHNOLOGY

After *Metal Gear*, our hero left FOXHOUND, dabbled with the CIA and then retired in Canada - a fitting end for our awesome hero. However, Kojima brought him back to return a favour. So, it was back to stealthy, tactical espionage action, but this time everything was better: more features and more dialogue from even more characters; and the game was more challenging because of improved enemy intelligence.



HOT GAMES AT THE TIME

The Secret of Monkey Island; Loom; Stunts; Kings Quest V: Absence Makes the Heart Go Yonder!; Quest For Glory 1: So You Want To Be A Hero; Out of this World; Eye of the Beholder; Golden Axe; Red Baron; Dangerous Dave; Commander Keen Episode 1: Marooned on Mars; Star Control.

PLAYING IT NOW

Once again, *Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence* for the PlayStation 2 comes to the rescue. Along with the improved *Metal Gear*, you also get *Metal Gear 2: Solid Snake*. Both still rely on clues in the game manual to complete certain objectives, but the manual provided with *Subsistence* doesn't include the required information. You can find what you need in the Konami FAQ for *Subsistence* at http://web.archive.org/web/20060423095908/http://www.konami.com/gs/mgs3_faq.php.

METAL GEAR SOLID

YEAR: 1998 / PLATFORM: PLAYSTATION

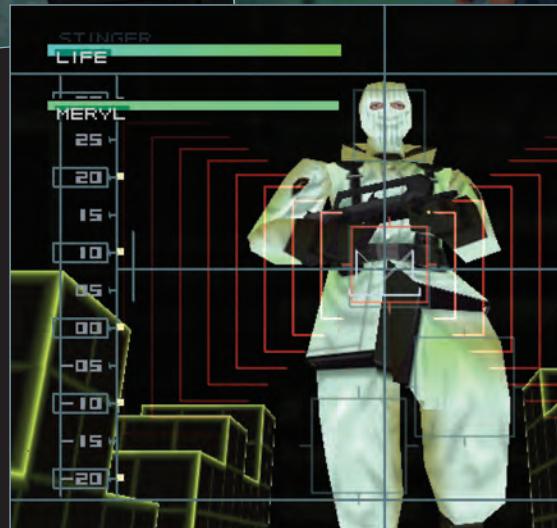
AND AGAIN, SOLID SNAKE is forced out of retirement. FOXHOUND and the 'next-generation special force' had been training on an island in Alaska's Fox Archipelago, when suddenly both military units started demanding the remains of legendary mercenary "Big Boss." Solid Snake to the rescue in 3D!

THERE'S INTERACTION IN MY MOVIE!

Metal Gear Solid on the hot, new PlayStation console, and suddenly we had blockbuster action with incredible drama for a bunch of polygons. And they said polygons would never act. Throw in some truly fascinating experiences in videogame narrative, and what you had was one solid title that actually had a boss that could read your mind. And you discovered that love could blossom on the battlefield.

MORE INTEGRAL

Later re-released for the PlayStation and PC, this re-release included a ton of new content, features and an additional 300 virtual-reality 'training missions'.



PLAYING IT NOW

Try to track down an original PlayStation copy or the PC port, which can be played with a keyboard. There is also the expanded *Metal Gear Solid: Integral* for the PlayStation and PC, as well as *Metal Gear Solid: The Twin Snakes* for the GameCube. Astute collectors may want the *20th Anniversary Edition* for the PlayStation 2, which contains *Metal Gear Solid*, *Metal Gear Solid 2: Subsistence* and *Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence*.

HOT GAMES AT THE TIME

Half-Life; Grim Fandango; Baldur's Gate; Thief: The Dark Project; StarCraft; Need for Speed III: Hot Pursuit; Fallout 2; Unreal; Myth II: Soulblighter; Shogo: Mobile Armor Division; SimCity 3000; Final Fantasy VII; StarSiege Tribes; Riven: The Sequel to Myst; Oddworld: Abe's Exodus; Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six; SiN: Forsaken; Carmageddon 2: Carpocalypse Now; Descent: FreeSpace; Banjo Kazooie; Starfox 64; GoldenEye.

METAL GEAR SOLID 2: SONS OF LIBERTY

YEAR: 2001 / PLATFORM: PLAYSTATION 2

IT WAS THE START of the PlayStation 2 revolution and Kojima's games had proven that he couldn't resist pushing acceptable boundaries. In the case of the PlayStation 2, the additional power made *Metal Gear Solid 2* all the more fantastic and the additional buttons on the gamepad made your hands all the more cramped, but allowed Solid Snake to be massaged out of truly life-threatening situations.

BIPOLAR BAHR

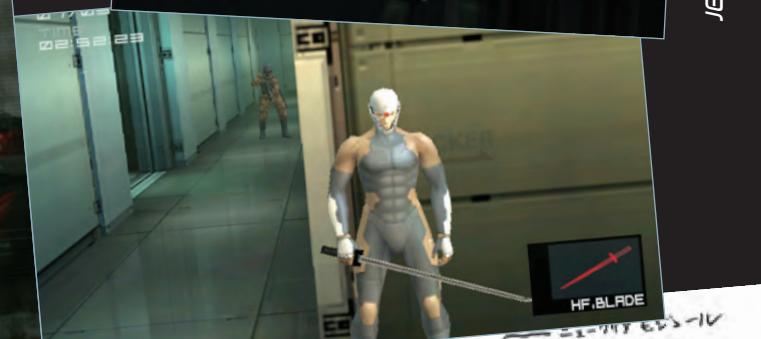
Most of the game was played as Raiden. If you liked Raiden you were in for a treat. If you hated the whiny, androgynous meat sack in a wetsuit, then you were in for a rough time. Beyond that, it was action, sneaking and insane boss fights - all of it Kojima-approved content, and the crazy yet charismatic cut-scenes just got longer and more dramatic.

THAT VAMPIRE HAS A KNIFE

Tipping off guards didn't just make them run at you and shoot. They'd actually call for backup. That backup would arrive, kitted out with riot shields, and would systematically start sweeping your last, known location. They'd check every nook and cranny with frustratingly tenacity until they found you. An all-out gun battle was not the ideal situation. There was also a scene where a vampire pirouetted over a fat man on roller skates.

SUBSTANCE

It wouldn't be *Metal Gear* without a re-release that added a lot more content.



HOT GAMES AT THE TIME

Max Payne; Black & White; Civilization III; Baldur's Gate II: Throne of Bhaal; Return to Castle Wolfenstein; Clive Barker's Undying; Startopia; Commands 2: Men of Courage; Tribes 2; Serious Sam: The First Encounter; Diablo II: Lord of Destruction; Fallout Tactics: Brotherhood of Steel; Anachronox; Gothic; Empire Earth; Emperor: Battle for Dune; Red Faction; Oni; Worms World Party.

PLAYING IT NOW

Hunt down an original PlayStation 2 copy or *Metal Gear Solid 2: Subsistence*, the multi-platform and updated version for the PlayStation 2, Xbox and PC.

METAL GEAR SOLID 3: SNAKE EATER

YEAR: 2004 / PLATFORM: PLAYSTATION 2

INSTEAD OF CONTINUING IN a linear fashion after *Metal Gear Solid 2*, the third game took the action back to the Cold War. You were "Naked Snake," sent into the Soviet jungle to find a missing scientist who had been working on a tank that could fire nukes. Cool. *Snake Eater* even had a catchy theme song.

STILL IN A DREAM

It was all back-story plot development as you played through events leading up to the start of the series. The tight tights and face paint made all the difference in staying undetected in the undergrowth. A high fall would actually cause fractured bones, which would affect the gameplay. You had to eat or go hungry, and you couldn't aim. The Paradox system, originally in *Snake Eater*, was removed at the last minute, because having only one life ended up being too difficult. Being removed so suddenly near the end of development heavily affected the Survival system, making *Snake Eater* requiring a bit more patience than its predecessors. Eating bunnies raw took time.

SNAKE VS. MONKEY

Still silly at points, *Snake Eater* included a mini-game in which you had to catch monkeys from the *Ape Escape* series.



HOT GAMES AT THE TIME

Half-Life 2; Unreal Tournament 2004; World of Warcraft; Rome: Total War; The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay; The Sims 2; Far Cry; Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War; Thief: Deadly Shadows; Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow; Battlefield Vietnam; Tribes: Vengeance; Counter-Strike: Source; Need for Speed Underground 2; Prince of Persia: Warrior Within; Painkiller; Ground Control 2; Vampire: The Masquerade – Bloodlines; Full Spectrum Warrior; Star Wars: Battlefront.

PLAYING IT NOW

The game is still reasonably new, so you should be able to find it at local retail outlets at a decent price. The *Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence* re-release for the PlayStation 2 was available on www.take2.co.za at the time of writing.

SUBSISTENCE

This time, a new online mode was added to the game, allowing up to eight people to battle it out in Deathmatch or Capture the Flag, using the full move set and item catalogue of the game.

METAL GEAR GAMES NOT COVERED

For the sake of clarity and space, we bluntly ignored the non-canonical sequels and sideline spin-offs.

Metal Gear Solid: Portable Ops (2006, PSP): A direct sequel to *Metal Gear Solid 3* but not directed by Hideo Kojima, *Portable Ops* maintains the action-based gameplay of the series, but with a heavier focus on online play and team-based mechanics.

Snake's Revenge (1990, NES): Produced in Japan for the Western market (there was never a Japanese version), *Snake's Revenge* introduced several changes/additions to the formula, making it very much a standalone sequel to the NES version of *Metal Gear*.

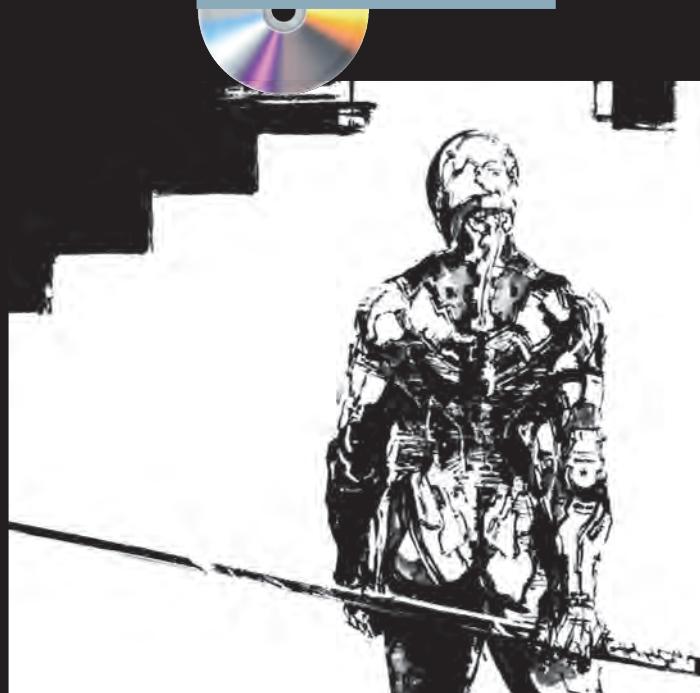
Metal Gear: Ghost Babel (2000, Game Boy Color): It used the storyline of *Metal Gear* as a back story by picking up the plot seven years later, but ignored the story of *Metal Gear 2* and *Metal Gear Solid* entirely.

Metal Gear Acid (2004, PSP) and Metal Gear Acid 2 (2005, PSP): Unlike the other *Metal Gear* titles, *Acid* forwent the stealth gameplay elements and instead used a card-based interface for turn-based actions.

OTACLOCK

OtaClock: A cute little desktop app that will tell you the date and time, and make the digital Otacon laugh when the alarm goes off.

ON THE DVD



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Jouez dans une pièce correctement
éclairée en vous tenant suffisamment
loin de l'écran.



SOLID SNAKE IN PARIS

Sounds a little dirty, doesn't it?

THE USUAL

Get on a plane, be uncomfortable for a while, grab expensive transportation to get from airport to hotel (ouch, the credit card), be herded around with the other sheep (journalists), listen to well-trained marketing people selling their products (only awkward when the games they're selling are actually quite terrible and they know it), get taken on a tour of the tourism spots (fine if you're into that kind of thing), back to airport, on a plane, one uncomfortable trip home and it's back to work writing pages of text detailing information you can find on the Internet anyway.

THE UNCOMMON

Few press events are a chore, to be fair. Yet, it seems almost inevitable that certain recurring events start feeling less like an adventure each time. Or perhaps I've simply seen the 'meat-market' one too many times. Who knows?

It was with this frame of mind that I felt a little dejected when offered a three-day trip to Paris France to "go look at Metal Gear Solid 4." Sure, I'm interested in MSG4. Who wouldn't be? But yet another press event just didn't sound like much fun.

Then again, *Metal Gear Solid 4...*

The flight wasn't very uncomfortable (pro tip: just take your own snacks and don't eat the airline food). And then the big surprise... Konami representatives at the airport ready to ferry me to the hotel. Now we're talking! And I was even handed a MSG4-themed paper notebook (for taking notes), which included the full itinerary and map of the area surrounding the hotel.

It's geeky, but I like stuff like that.

THE UNUSUAL SUSPECTS

Checking out the itinerary while stuck in the Parisian rush hour, it became apparent that the structure of this particular press event was slightly different from the usual fare. Doth mine eyes deceive me? Not a single entry for visiting the Eiffel tower, which I had always thought some kind of sacred ritual or something when in Paris. This was indeed unusual amidst the cunning 'usualness' of midtown traffic congestion barring the way to the sweet relief of a hotel shower. And what a stunning hotel... smack in the middle of Paris. To be blunt, I'm not very fond of Paris itself, but France is a beautiful country. The people are an acquired taste it seems, one I have yet to enjoy, but lovely people nonetheless.

By this point, I had realised that leaving the hotel was not really the plan at all. The perky, because-they're-being-paid MSG4 'ladies' ushered me (and I assume all the other smelly geeks who'd been arriving all day) down into the bowels of the hotel and into a subterranean conference hall decked out with more giant-sized LCD screens than I'd ever seen. Five long rows of tables supporting around sixteen screens per row, making it over 80 PlayStation 3s in the room. And in front of each screen: a set of surround-sound headphones neatly positioned next to each PS3 controller, a bottle of water and a little sign indicating who sits there.

Being from South Africa, my flight was pretty much the last one in and many people were already knee-deep in pseudo-Middle





HOG-TIED

During the E3 (Electronic Entertainment Expo) 2004 in Los Angeles, two unknown kleptomaniacs stole a copy of the *MSG3: Snake Eater* demo code by cracking the display case, ejecting the disc and cheesing it before the fuzz arrived. So perhaps it wasn't so strange to see every single PS3 at the Paris event with two sturdy cable ties wrapped around the PS3 to block the disc drive. No stealing for you, you thieving gaming press!

East, geriatric Snake-sneaking missions.

Damn European press! You will not spoil anything for me because I can see your screen!

Right about here, there was a mad dash to find my allocated seat, because the whole point of this particular press event was to actually play the game. Finally, someone spoke my language!

STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND

You'll have to work with me here because at first I really didn't like *MSG4*. The first day of the three-day event and I was sitting there thinking, "There is no way I'm going to be able to suffer through three days of this."

By the end of Act 1, my trepidation was firmly in place and a conundrum presented itself. It's not that there was anything wrong with *MSG4*, but I just wasn't 'feeling' it. That's a hard view to quantify I discovered. At dinner that night the only question anyone from the European press could ask me was, "So what do you think of it?" The best I could come up with was that I needed more time with the game - which was true.

Act 2 managed to turn it around for me. By the end of the game, I was in awe. *Metal Gear Solid 4* isn't a game: it's a giant, multi-headed hydra beast stomping through reality, generating an incredible amount of noise, and the press didn't have a clue what to do with it! Giant multi-headed hydra beasts are pretty awesome.

MARKETING CONFESSIONS

It is clear that the entire event was carefully designed to give the journalists the best possible experience with the



game. A few responsibility free days, giant-screen LCDs, free food and even a massage area that myself and the rest of the press carefully avoided (aversion to plastic palm fronds personally, but I don't speak for the rest of the press).

"Carefully designed" may be an understatement: after finishing the game and being surprised at how half of the room of eighty journalists didn't even make it to the final act, we were each handed out a list of ultimatums for previews and reviews.

Thou shalt not talk about anything outside Act 1. Thou shalt not mention product X or feature Y. Thou shalt not write thou review like a description of the game from start to finish. Four pages of explicit instructions that read like a Dummies Guide to Writing Good Reviews. It is a document I happen to agree with actually.

Looking at some of the previews, reviews and news articles appearing online, it seems that few people share such a 'spoiler-free' view on gaming. Having played through the entire *MSG4*, I can say with certainty that it is a unique experience... one I would not want to ruin for anyone.

ACCREDITED DEALER

I would like to thank SK Games and Konami for the opportunity and wonderful event. I would like to thank Hideo Kojima for the awkward moment when I realised that he was looking over my shoulder while I was being maimed in a particular boss fight. It was very emasculating. **NAG**

Miktar Dracon

WHAT WE'RE PLAYING



CALL OF DUTY 4 [360]

The new map pack rocks our USMC-issued socks. Especially the sniper-dappled slopes of Creek. Invite your Xbox LIVE friends for a few rounds of army-flavoured fun, while you squat behind the bushes in a ghillie suit and pick them off one by one. Remember, it's not camping if... well, it is camping, but it's like a camping holiday. This is the fun kind of camping.

THE WORLD ENDS WITH YOU [DS]

Square Enix went to Jupiter (*Spectrebes, Kingdom Hearts: Chain of Memories*) and said, "Hi guys, have the full budget we usually reserve for a *Final Fantasy*" and Jupiter, suspecting this to be a joke, went and developed a DS game using that budget. The result: the single most innovative JRPG since the dawn of time.

KANE'S WRATH [PC]

Some *Tiberium Wars* veterans have been rather shocked to discover that the game balances in *Kane's Wrath* have changed more than superficially, and have suffered humiliating defeats, making them feel like n00bs all over again. Now many multiplayer games are being played, and may, hopefully, result in an upcoming strategy guide...

GEARS OF WAR [360]

Oh, we just can't wait for *Gears 2* to emerge in November. Every day is an eternity of agonising anticipation. Therefore, we whipped out Marcus and Dom for another tour of not-so-sunny Sera, and spent the entire weekend swatting Locust. Actually, this is really just a feeble excuse for Tarryn to brag that she has just finished the game on Insane difficulty. With a Long shot.

VIVA PIÑATA [360]

Rare's bizarre paper-creature farmer garden simulator is just the sort of thing mummy, daddy and your perennially tripped-out former hippy aunty want you to play instead of all those violent murder simulators. Who knew that luring Pretztales and Buzzlegums into your garden would be so much fun, especially with half a bottle of whiskey down your gullet. It's available at the scandalously reasonable price of R129, so there's no excuse for not owning and secretly adoring it.

POW!
KER-NAG!

ANATOMY OF A REVIEW

A quick guide to the NAG Reviews section

VITAL INFO: Where to get it, what it costs and who you need.

PC SPEC: Our rating for the hardware requirements of games is space age. Check the box on the other page.

GAME NAME: This ends up. The bit you tell your friends. The bit you remember – with your brain!

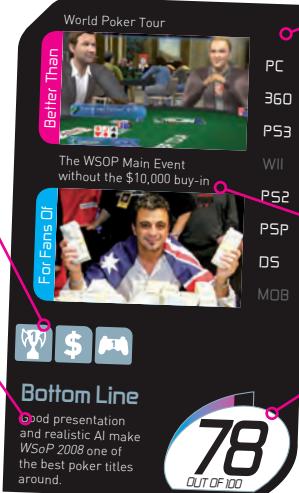
AWARDS: Our awards mean something: it means we agreed on a game, which is rare, trust us.



THINK INSIDE THE BOX

ICONS: It's just like a super-ultra-mini review: you just glance and learn!

BOTTOM LINE: Too many words, not enough pictures? Don't worry – we'll bottom-line it for ya.



PLATFORMS: Check it: new coloured tabbed system showing which systems the game appears on and on which one we reviewed it on.

LIKE, Y'KNOW, STUFF: We try to keep things in perspective using these two blocks.

SCORE: Sometimes it's a number (usually it is). Sometimes it's a picture, or something snarky. We like to mix things up a little.

WEB SCORES

IRON MAN [PS3]



NAG	50/100
METACRITIC	42/100
GAMERANKINGS	44.4/100

METAL GEAR SOLID 4 [PS3]



NAG	91/100
METACRITIC	95/100
GAMERANKINGS	93/100

PENNY ARCADE ADVENTURES [PC]



NAG	89/100
METACRITIC	77/100
GAMERANKINGS	76.2/100

THE REVIEW ICONS

The NAG review icons aim to help you get a better idea of what a game is like.



ACTION: When you gotta blast, smash, crash and mash your way to victory, it's Action.



BABYSITTING: Put the kids to bed, you gotta Babysit this game to make it love you.



BITCHIN': When a game just plain rocks despite everything, then it is worthy of the Bitchin'.



BORING: Grab your blankie and teddy, we might be in for some Boring to put you to sleep.



BUGGY: Truth be told, there is just no excusing a Buggy game because games aren't cheap.



BUTTON MASHER: Using only the power of your manly thumb, you can beat this game, Button Masher.



CASH-IN/LICENSE: Some companies totally Cash-in on License games, good or bad.



CINEMATIC: Sweet-ass cut-scenes, dramatic camerawork and awesome scenes are Cinematic.



CLONE: We've seen it before and we'll see it again, because people always Clone good stuff.



CO-OP: It is dangerous to go alone. Take this. A friend. Water with cooperation for Co-op Attack.



COMPETITIVE: You don't think Ranked Match is a feature; you think it should be mandatory.



FOREIGN: No clue what the game is about or even what is said? Confusing plot? It's Foreign!



MULTIPLAYER: The maximum number of people who can play per copy of the game.



ONLINE: For games that play well with others and generally mean playing with others, Online.



PARTY: Get some friends and move the couch, Party games are frikkin' sweet.



PIECE OF POO: Sometimes no matter how hard you try, you just can't squeeze a diamond out of a turd.



STUPID PEOPLE: Don't worry little buddy, this game holds your hand like a friend.

TRACKMANIA UNITED FOREVER [PC]



NAG	92/100
METACRITIC	84/100
GAMERANKINGS	80/100

WILL IT RUN? - PC GAME SPECS

PC game specs are a pain for us, because we need to list them for those people who don't consult the box before buying a game. Instead, the reviews will now have a nice number ranking on the side. Higher numbers mean a game is more machine intensive. If a game has all the numbers lit up, it'll run on a 5-year-old piece of junk up to the most bad-ass of machines.

5 Your machine has a DirectX 10 graphics card, a dual-core or higher CPU and 2GB or more RAM. You are the centre of gaming-fu. This game will honour your investment. **[DX10 graphics card; dual/quad-core CPU; 2GB+ RAM]**

4 Your graphics card has a respectable 256MB of memory and your CPU sits at the higher end of 2GHz, backed by 1-2GB of RAM. A worthy rig for a worthy game. **[256MB graphics card with DX9; 2GHz or more; 1-2GB RAM]**

3 Your card sits between 128 and 256MB of RAM with at least DirectX 8 support, while your 2GHz Pentium 4 churns happily with between 512MB and 1GB of RAM. We assume you're slowly saving for an upgrade. **[256MB+ graphics card with DX8; 2GHz Pentium 4; 512MB-1GB RAM]**

2 Okay, so you have a graphics card that falls below the 128MB memory point but supports DX8, a chip that you can't call 2GHz even if you wanted and you have 256MB or less RAM. Your PC might be getting more Office action than you'd like to admit. **[128MB or lower graphics card with DX8; Below 2GHz chip; 256MB or lower RAM]**

1 You really don't think about your PC specs much. In fact, any hint of upgrade money is spent on something more practical, like a coffee maker with a timer. Fresh coffee first thing in the morning always beats playing games. **[Can run XP, will play game]**

NAG AWARDS

EDITOR'S CHOICE: If a game boasts this award, it means everyone in the office agrees that the game rocks. Serials.



MUST PLAY: The thing about the Must Play award is that it can happen anywhere, with any game, good or bad. Somehow, you must play this game.



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VIKING: BATTLE FOR ASGARD [360]



NAG	73/100
METACRITIC	68/100
GAMERANKINGS	69.5/100

HAZE [PS3]



NAG	59/100
METACRITIC	56/100
GAMERANKINGS	57.3/100

THE REVIEWERS

WALT PRETORIUS

(wiredus kattus)



When threatened, this creature quickly resorts to imbibing forty cups of coffee. It is unclear how this staves off predators, which may attribute to the dwindling numbers of this species. Likes raw fish, MILFs and dogs.

SEAN JAMES

(squidilius wettus)



In an incredible feat of nature, this creature is not only able to camouflage itself by hiding in garbage, but it can also use its prehensile nose to write complex communiqués. Likes aerodynamic objects and empty cups.

ADAM LIEBMAN

(molescurvy rattus)



For years, scientists were unsure if this was fauna or flora due to this creature's penchant for mimicking underbrush. Its stare is known to cause Palsy. Likes a warm, damp patch in the sun.

TARRYN VAN DER BYL

(isqueakyus duplicus)



Using a strange kind of hive-mind, this creature actually maintains two completely independent organisms that communicate via gaseous excretions. Likes playing poker with itself, fire and purple tentacles.

MICHAEL JAMES

(piggus fuzzius)



Rarely seen in the wild after its natural habitat was all but destroyed by oxygen, this creature has over time developed an incredible survival mechanism: a credit card. Likes cod, trout and gunpowder.

CHRIS BISTLINE

(holylus crappus batmanus)



Only one sample of this rare creature has ever been retrieved. All other attempts were met with stern resistance from the polar icecaps. Likes congregating, building complicated underground networks and your shirt.

MIKTAR DRACON

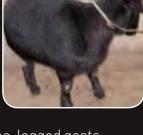
(luminous pieees)



When the Moon is in equinox and Sol is in alignment, these sea-dwelling organisms gather until their natural glow can be seen from Alpha Centauri. Likes inflatable pool toys, coyotes and space-faring dinosaurs.

ALEX JELAGIN

(three-bagger goatnaggerus)



A rare genetic mutation, this goat subspecies only has three legs. When approached, it uses one leg to trip the other two and remains prostrate until the threat leaves. Likes other three-legged goats.



METAL GEAR SOLID 4: GUNS OF THE PATRIOTS

IT'S BEEN FIVE YEARS since the "Manhattan Incident" detailed in *Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty*. Private military companies now fight proxy wars for business purposes pretty much anywhere in the world, because the restrictions on military intervention on foreign soil have been lifted. The five largest PMCs are owned by Outer Haven, run by Liquid Ocelot - who still has a vendetta against Solid Snake and also wants to take over the world. In goes the aged Solid Snake (the FOXDIE virus he was infected with in *MGS1* having turned the clock forward), now code-named "Old Snake."

GEARING UP

If you've never played a *Metal Gear Solid* title before, there is a good chance that the fourth instalment could be a tad overwhelming, as the series itself is a particularly nuanced experience. But if you're up for it, *Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots* is an experience to behold.

The gameplay remains unchanged and with an emphasis on stealth, Old Snake has a variety of tools and moves at his disposal to avoid enemies and giant bipedal robots that 'moo'. Aside from hiding in and under things, Old Snake now also has the Octocamo suit that will automatically blend with whatever surface Old Snake leans against or crawls along. You can manually set camouflage patterns akin to *MGS3: Snake Eater* if you want, but it's not required.

You can also hide in an oil drum, which remains surprisingly useful.

PSYCHOLOGICALLY SOUND

There is a new Psyche Gauge that influences health regeneration. Old Snake will regenerate a portion of his death-stopping health bar, but only as long as his Psyche Gauge isn't completely tapped. The Psyche Gauge is in turn influenced by stress. If Old Snake is stuck in a bad spot or gets bad news (even during cut-scenes), his stress increases. Exceed 50%, and you start to lose Psyche. It's an interesting dynamic, especially in the middle of a firefight, but it brings with it a very new kind of 'I'm going to die' panic.

There is also the Combat High, which occurs if Old Snake gets trigger-happy during the Alert Phase (having been spotted by the enemy). During a Combat High, the Psyche Gauge doesn't decrease and damage against Old Snake is halved. However, his stress level increases to

100%. Stress is a killer.

In true health-conscious fashion, you can lower stress by letting Old Snake light one up or flip through one of the breasts-and-buxom magazines you can leave around to distract guards.

FUN-PLAY

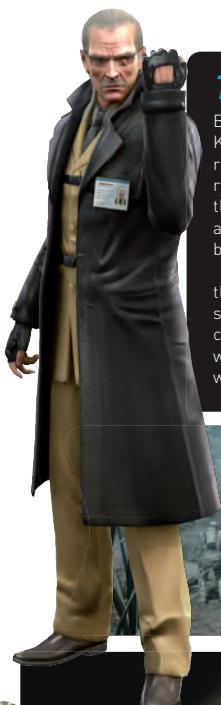
It is actually possible to finish *MGS4* without making a single kill, only using non-lethal force. That's not to say you can't blast your way as far as you can before running to a corner to hide: there are ample guns, rocket launchers, grenades and other armaments, most with a large degree of customisability.

A new character, Drebin, acts as your 'anywhere, anytime' weapons dealer and launderer (since some guns found on the battlefield are locked to soldier IDs). Extra guns picked up on the battlefield are automatically exchanged for Drebin Points, which adjust based on the amount of same-type guns acquired.

INSTALLATION

MGS4 installs on the HDD of the PS3, but it spreads out across multiple points so you don't have one big install at the beginning. It doesn't keep data for sections you have completed, so if you restart from the beginning, you will have to sit through the load screens again, which take at most five minutes a time with at least several hours of gaming in between.





THE KONAMI CODE

By now, some of you might have heard about "the document" Konami gave reviewers, asking them to please adhere to the requests contained within. In short and paraphrased, "Dear reviewer. Try not to ruin the game by spoiling the plot, cheapen the experience or harping on about how long the cut-scenes are. Please don't talk about feature X, location Y or character Z, because it would reveal things best left not revealed."

Certain publications that enjoy publishing eight-page reviews that practically read like a walk-through have naturally taken some offence at these requests, no matter how sound the logic contained within. When *NAG* was presented with this document, we simply shrugged and said, "It's cool, Hideo. We know what we're doing."



RADAR

After meeting up with Otacon and getting reacquainted with the little controllable Mk. II robot, you can steer around the battlefield. Old Snake gains the Solid Eye, a replacement radar system. It shows enemy locations, their 'sense' ranges and also functions as binoculars or night-vision goggles. It runs out of power, but recharges and additional batteries can be found.

There is also the 'threat ring' encircling Old Snake that shows the direction of threats: the higher the wave in a specific direction, the more dangerous the enemy. (Useful!)

NUNS OF THE PATRIOTS

Very few games combine this level of seriousness with outright quirkiness. A monkey in a PVC diaper aside, it pays to not forget that *Metal Gear Solid* is many ideas, themes and styles combined into something quite unique and perhaps a little terrifying to the average player. It would be easy to laundry list the new features, locations, characters and spoil any semblance of you discovering them for yourselves, but that's not going to happen here.

MGS4 is a giant, self-referential swan song, wrapped up in its menagerie of over-the-top characters, boss fights and situations. Underneath all that oozing 'metal gearness', however, lays an idiosyncratic experience that lets you approach situations in a variety of ways, catering to more action-orientated sensibilities as well as a tactical flavour.

Yes, the cut-scenes in *MGS4* are mostly very long but very interesting – how it's supposed to be. Upon completion, *MGS4* ranks you based on a bucket load of criteria, with various rewards doled out depending on the 'badges' you get, urging you to play through again. **NAG**

Miktar "Eagle Rank" Dracon

Better Than

Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater



PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

As Good As

Metal Gear Solid



Bottom Line

Expect the unexpected and enjoy this one for its scope, vision and incredulously gargantuan balls.

91
OUT OF 100



MEMORY GEAR SOLID

Kojima asked that journalists share their memories of *Metal Gear Solid*. The thing about *Metal Gear Solid* for me is that there just wasn't anything like it at the time: serious themes and issues, silly dialogue and fourth-wall moments, puzzles that border on pure genius, heartfelt moments, actual emotions in the character voices, cinematic direction and a wonderful musical score that forever remains an echo in your head.

Before *Metal Gear Solid*, games were becoming more like movies, but *MGS* was every bit the movie games wished to be but with actual gameplay to back it up: tactical espionage stealthiness that involved hiding in lockers, under boxes, avoiding cameras, setting traps, fighting increasingly surreal bosses and laughing at some of the truly terrible dialogue that, in hindsight, was quite intentional. It is the type of game that left a mark on those who had the patience it required... when shooting stuff with rocket launchers was King.



BATTLEFIELD: BAD COMPANY

YOU ARE PRESTON MARLOWE. The opening in-game movie sees you reporting for duty at the 222nd Army Battalion, B-Company, and meeting the rest of your team, Sergeant Redford, Sweetwater and Haggard. B-Company (or more specifically 'Bad Company') is where the army puts all their troublemakers, rejects and insubordinates – the alternative of course being prison. Considered as expendable assets, they're usually the first to arrive in hostile territory and often the last ones out. With nothing to lose, you climb onto the back of a truck and begin the adventure of your life. The rest of this story is told as the game plays out across seven huge maps that are subdivided into numerous checkpoint-to-checkpoint missions. The voice acting, character behaviour and third party-interaction all fit together perfectly and blend appropriately with the tongue-in-cheek direction the game often takes. From the cheesy music to the inane banter between the characters, *Battlefield: Bad*

Company never takes itself seriously and you can easily tell that the developers were having a lot of fun developing this game.

APPLY HERE FOR YOUR BUILDING PERMIT

If you play many first-person shooters, you'll find that *Bad Company* is a 'little different'. Thanks to the powerful Frostbite Engine that runs the game world, the environments feel expansive and varied, gunfire cuts down trees and explosive shells make holes in the ground. When fighting in towns or around farm dwellings, this destructiveness is applied to almost any structure in the game: bricks, concrete, wood and glass shatter and fly in all directions during intense battles. Add to this some of the best-looking visuals on the Xbox 360 and no discernable drop in frame rates (even during big battles), and you have a cracking sandbox environment that just begs to be explored and enjoyed. In an attempt to extend the playability of the game and to give players



something else to do instead of just shooting and running for cover, the developers have hidden collectible weapons and gold bars on all the maps. Although the gold bars have no real in-game value as such, finding new weapons is worth the time investment. In total, there are 29 collectible weapons, ranging from room brooms (shotguns) to advanced sniper rifles. Hunting these items down can sometimes make all the difference in how easy a mission goes.

TYPICAL GAME

On the ground, *Bad Company* is a first-person shooter and therefore involves a lot of running around, ducking behind cover, shooting, healing and dying. Your B-Company mates are there to help you out in the game, but their involvement is purely cosmetic. Don't get the wrong idea here: they do kill the bad guys and even take out the odd helicopter or tank here and there. Just don't expect them to do all the hard work – that's your job. Thankfully,



MULTIPLAYER

In the May issue of NAG, we covered the multiplayer aspects of *Battlefield: Bad Company* in a two-page hands-on preview. Needless to say, nothing has changed and the multiplayer component is as highly polished as ever and fortunately doesn't seem to suffer too much from lag, even though we connected to international servers. Considering how highly enjoyable the single-player game is, not getting yourself a copy of this is a crime.



they hardly ever get in the way and should you decide to jump into a vehicle, they'll all instantly and magically appear right next to you. This means no waiting around while they come running from all over the place and climb in. This is one of many smart design choices in the game and something other developers could learn from. Besides running around on foot everywhere, the game allows players to drive vehicles across the map. Sometimes these vehicles must be earned via a tough battle and other times they're given freely (depending on the mission and map). Players will get to drive/pilot jeeps, armoured personnel carriers, boats, tanks, a helicopter and even golf carts! Do note that in the tank-versus-golf-cart debate, the tank always wins. The decision to drive over parts of the map or take it slowly and stealthily on foot is entirely up to the player. The great thing about *Bad Company* is that it really does allow players to complete the missions in their own way, but generally steers players towards the

best way. Another smart design element is that the mission environment doesn't reset when you die. If you're killed, you appear back at the most recent checkpoint and everything you've killed at that point stays dead. This is most useful if you're struggling to get through a tough mission. And tough they are - particularly towards the middle and end of the game. The more you play, the more you realise that the artificial intelligence is a lot smarter and realistic than in many other games. In fact, *Bad Company* has some of the best-behaving enemies in recent times. They'll duck behind windows and concrete blocks, dive and roll for cover and quickly pull out a knife if you get too close. The game definitely puts up one hell of a fight on the standard difficulty setting, and most of these encounters will result in a few retries. During most battles, the game engine is the true star of the show thanks to the way it handles the environment. Hiding behind a wall usually means that the wall will disappear soon,

The real thing

As Good As



PC
360
PS3
Wii
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

Awesome

For Fans of



86 OUT OF 100

Bottom Line

Bad Company ticks all the boxes with its riveting and immersive single-player experience.

NAG



GOLD EDITION

Battlefield: Bad Company Gold Edition will retail at R699. In case you're wondering what the extra R100 gets you, here's an excerpt from the press release: "The Gold Edition pack features exclusive content with behind-the-scenes action and strategy videos, giving *Battlefield: Bad Company* players tricks and tips on how to own the battlefield. The Gold Edition also gives gamers early access to five unique weapons that players can take into battle. These weapons can also be unlocked after the launch of the game by ranking up to the highest level in multiplayer mode." So, instead of earning your strips the old-fashioned way, now you can just buy them. You have to love commercialism.



leaving you exposed. Fire a rocket into a forest, and trees will come crashing down, adding to the confusion. Although most buildings cannot be flattened to the ground, there's no shortage of flying debris and chaos during a fight, and after the dust has settled and all the bad guys are dead, the whole area shows the signs of war with huge holes in the ground, smoke everywhere and smashed buildings. Another area often just tacked-on by most developers is the sound. *Bad Company*'s developers have excelled in this department, with weighty 'feeling' tank tracks, appropriately muffled gunfire, bullets zinging past and some awesome explosions. With all the smoke, shouting, explosions and flying debris, the game successfully draws you into the action, and for a short while here and there makes you feel like you're really in the middle of it all, fighting for your life.

FOR THE SEQUEL

It's very easy to go on and on about how great this game is. It's really very good, but it has some shortcomings. By adding hidden weapons and gold, most players will explore the whole map and all of the little buildings, only to find that they all look the same. There's some variation in the last two levels, but for the most part, the world in *Battlefield: Bad Company* seems to consist of the same ten or twenty building types repeated over and over. Equally distressing,

by going into these similar-looking buildings, players will also find that there's no furniture, paintings, cups or even dog kennels anywhere. It's a sparse world that looks pretty on the outside but is empty on the inside. For the next game, the creators should spend a little time adding some chairs and tables. The vehicle physics are a little 'off'. If one is driving a tank around, one doesn't expect it to suddenly jerk to the left when running into an immovable object. Overall, most of the vehicles handle well, but the tank can be a curse to drive, especially in confined spaces. The game is also too short. It can be argued that it's perfectly timed and when it ends, it definitely feels right in terms of the story and plot and it's good to see that the developers didn't add any pointless padding missions. It just feels a little short and if you simply run and gun your way through (as opposed to searching for weapons or gold and employing stealth here and there), it's going to feel even shorter. However, none of the negatives is even remotely serious enough to ruin the game, and any criticism is purely intended to make sure that the developers get the inevitable sequel just right. If you enjoy shooters, then you can't go very wrong with *Bad Company*. Remember, after the single-player game there's still hours and hours of enjoyable top-notch multiplayer gaming to enjoy.

NAG

Michael James

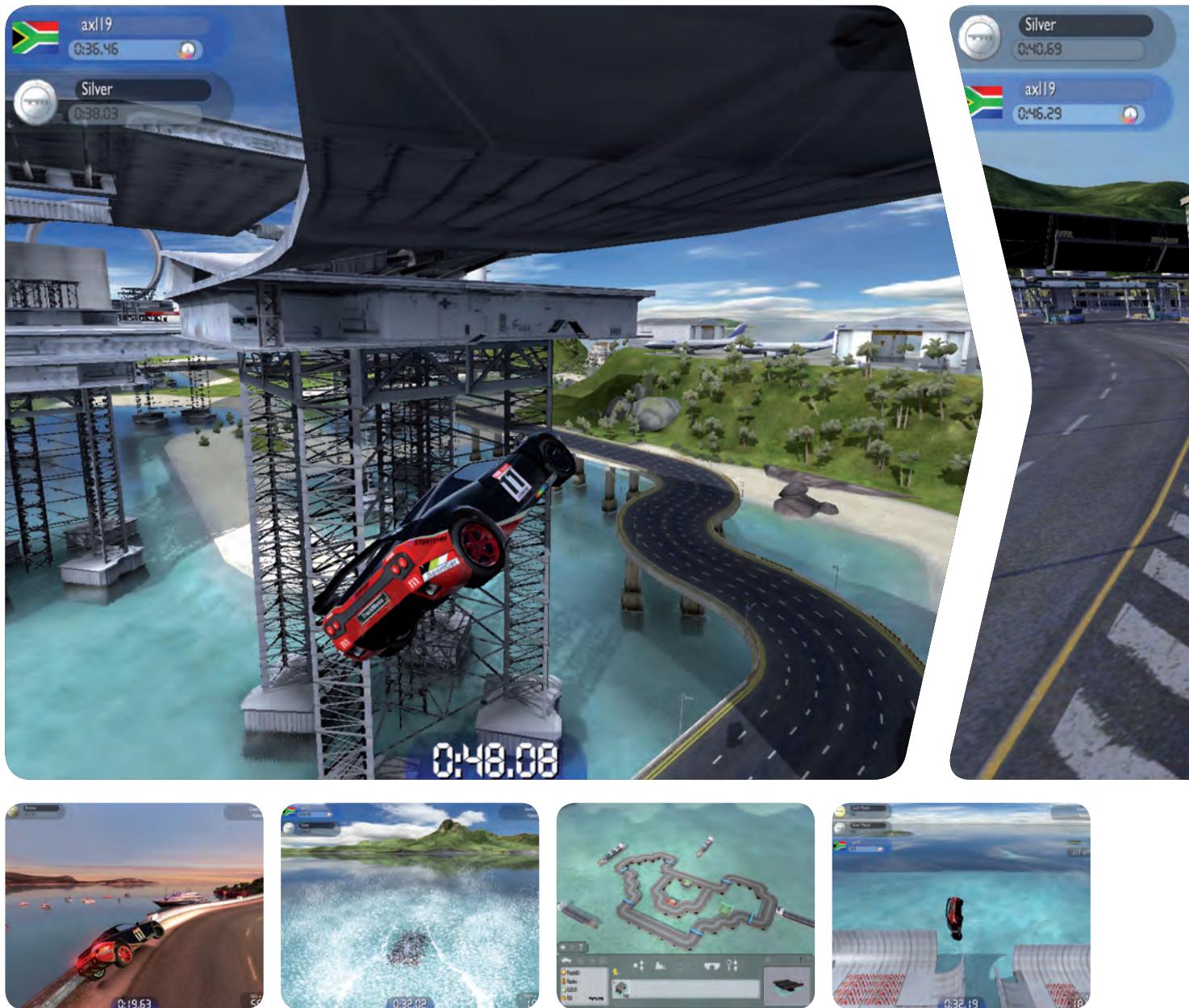


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TRACKMANIA UNITED FOREVER

HAVE A CONFESSION TO make, so let's just get it out of the way right now: I'd never played a *TrackMania* game until I played *TrackMania Nations Forever* a few months ago. It's embarrassing and inexcusable, I know. Shame on me.

What, you haven't either? No excuses! Go grab the June issue of *NAG* and pop the DVD into your computer. *TrackMania Nations Forever* is on the disc. It's free. It's awesome. You'll love it. Trust me.

Go! Seriously! Put the magazine down and do it now. I'll wait.

GO!

Good, you're back. Now you understand, don't you?

Now, let's talk about *TrackMania United Forever*, the big brother of *Nations Forever*. For those of you who didn't heed my advice and tried *Nations*, here's a quick synopsis of the *TrackMania* experience:

TrackMania is a series of racing challenges that steadily increase in

difficulty. The courses have ramps, bumps, obstacles, ridiculous sky-high banks, loops, half pipes, speed boosts and tunnels, where your car can travel upside down. At times, the course may be elevated hundreds of metres above the ground. The trick to *TrackMania* isn't just getting from A to B fast, it's also getting from A to B in the first place.

The crucial thing – and what helps to make the experience so addictive – is that the tracks are short and an instant restart is only a keystroke away. You race, you twist, you turn, you soar and smack... you miss the downward ramp and plummet to the ground. Undaunted, you restart. You race, you twist, you turn, you soar, you land and you fly off the track as you try to turn on the other side. Restart. Restart. Restart. Victory! You'll keep coming back until you get it right.

Even when you do get it right, you'll go back for some more. *TrackMania*



GAME MODES

RACE: Get from A to B faster than the other guy. Even your dog can grasp this concept.

PLATFORM: Kind of like *Mario Bros.* with cars. There's no time limit – just get to the finish line.

STUNT: Score points by flipping your car in the most creative way possible. 5x Chained Rodeo Spinoff 540! Rawk!

PUZZLE: Connect the pieces in the track editor, then give it a race.

has a medal system. You can choose to race against ghost cars for one of the three medal times, and as you move up the ranks, getting gold gets harder and harder. You're also competing against other players on a worldwide leader board. Now, add online play where you



IN THREE-DEEEE

Each copy of the game comes with a set of red/blue glasses that let you switch on 3D mode. Not recommended for people who get motion sick easily.



can compete on thousands of different servers all over the world – and a few right here in SA – plus an editor that lets you create your own tracks, and you can see why this game is about as addictive as crack cocaine.

All of this high-octane excitement is free in *Nations Forever*. *United* has all of that, including three more single-player modes, six more vehicle types and environments and 265 more tracks. And there's much more online to download. *United Forever* has its own currency, which you earn by collecting medals, and you can use it to buy new tracks from the different user-created sites you'll find online. Cleverly, you get to these using the game's integrated browser. There's a lot out there, and some of it is great.

So, follow my advice: Go play *TrackMania Nations Forever*, then buy *United Forever*. You'll thank me. **NAG**

Chris "Burnt Rubber" Bistline

Any Need for Speed game ever

Better Than

360

PS3

WII

PS2

PSP

DS

MOB

Car-Fu

For Fans of

Bottom Line

Engrossing and addictive. Even if you don't like racing games, you must try this one.

92
OUT OF 100

ENVIRONMENTS

TrackMania United Forever has seven different racing environments, each with a different car that has its own distinct feel and handling dynamics.

STADIUM: The same as the cars in *TMNF*. A little like F1... with loop-de-loops.



ISLAND: Super-fast, super-grip sports cars and palm trees.



DESERT: Bouncy, roll-prone junkers. Cactus everywhere.



RALLY: Hatchbacks jumping over hills. About what you'd expect.



BAY: SUVs and office buildings – just another day in America.



COAST: Ridge Racer feel with plenty of drift.



SNOW: Jeeps, savage inclines and frozen lakes.





HAZE

FREE RADICAL DESIGN, THE innovative development house behind such formidable titles as *Second Sight* and the *TimeSplitters* franchise, makes its next-generation debut with the PS3-exclusive *Haze*, which sadly fails to live up to the standards set by the developer's earlier titles. *Haze* is set in 2048, and tells the story of Shane Carpenter, a young recruit in the service of Mantel Global Industries, a multinational corporation with biomedical expertise. This has led to the development of Nova-Keto-Thyrazine, also called Nectar - a 'nutritional supplement' that enables soldiers to fight harder and smarter, but also induces a hallucinogenic effect, where soldiers are no longer cognisant of the real battlefield around them, instead viewing an idyllic, painless environment. The game begins with Shane and his unit who are sent to quell an uprising - led by a rebel group known as "The Promise Hand" - in South America. It soon becomes apparent that the rebels are, in fact, the less morally

bankrupt of the two opposing factions, and Shane's allegiance shifts and he joins the freedom fighters in their battle against his former allies.

The game's plot is ambitious, and tries to tackle some complex philosophical issues, but the narrative lacks the necessary subtlety and intelligence to avoid coming off simply as contrived and synthetic. In the game's dying moments, the storyline does attempt to introduce some thought-provoking criticism of the human condition, but it comes across as a disjointed, tacked-on afterthought rather than a well thought-out plot element. For a game that spends a fair amount of time forcing the player to sit through cut-scenes, *Haze*'s plot simply isn't immersive enough to do justice to what is certainly a promising premise.

As for the actual play dynamic, *Haze* is, for the most part, fairly typical fare. The most unique elements in the game stem from the two factions' unique abilities. In the first few missions, Shane has access to Nectar, which allows him to regenerate

health, strengthens his melee attacks, and makes enemies stand out in an orange glow, even when they're camouflaged. Take too much of the drug, however, and Shane will temporarily lose control of his actions, and go into a blind rage, shooting at friend and foe alike.

Of course, after defecting to the rebels, you lose access to Nectar, or at least the conventional uses thereof. Instead, you can now lie down on the floor as if you're dead, which makes you effectively invisible to the crazed Mantel soldiers, who are only interested in things that are still able to be killed. You'll also be able to steal weapons from your enemies, as well as induce overdoses in your opponents, either by tossing Nectar grenades at them, or by strategically shooting the Nectar dispensers strapped to their backs.

Although there is some fun to be had playing with both these sets of abilities, this is also where some of the inconsistencies that plague *Haze* become apparent. As a Mantel soldier, Nectar makes you a very



formidable weapon of destruction. As soon as you're fighting against Mantel soldiers, however, they become alarmingly weak and unintelligent. For some inexplicable reason, in spite of the heightened awareness that Nectar is supposed to provide them, they'll stand still while you walk right up and despatch them. In fact, the overall play dynamic is actually off-balance in favour of the rebels, if anything.

The lacklustre AI affects not only your opponents, but also your own squad members, who'll run straight through your line of sight while you're shooting at enemies, getting themselves killed in the process. There are also too many occasions where Shane comes under attack by his own teammates. In addition to the standard run-and-gun dynamic, *Haze* also offers a few clumsy driving sequences that are beset by 'loose' physics and aberrant camera angles.

To its credit, *Haze* does serve up a few moments of riveting entertainment, including a couple of remarkable rail-shooter

segments that truly are immersive, as well as the odd breathtaking set-piece battle.

There are one or two stand-out moments of graphical excellence scattered through the game, but aside from these rare occurrences, *Haze* is a mess of awkward animations, clipping errors, and dull character models.

The sound fares a little better, with some convincing sound effects and a fitting orchestral score to complement the action.

The multiplayer component of the game offers a slightly more enjoyable experience, though the game offers only three different modes, and most of the maps are too large (even for the maximum 16 players allowed). It's more entertaining than the single-player mode, but far too scant in comparison to other titles in this genre.

Ultimately, *Haze* isn't as much a horribly unplayable game as it is a disappointing one. The game is tedious and uninspired, but not unplayable, in spite of the miserable AI and dearth of available weaponry. **NAG**

Adam Liebman

Call of Duty 4



PC

360

PS3

WII

PS2

PSP

DS

MOB

Also worse than



Resistance: Fall of Man



Bottom Line

Great in some places, dismal in others.

59
OUT OF 100



WII FIT

ONCE UPON A TIME, I was like one of those sun-dappled children you see in cereal adverts, always scurrying hither and yon in that charmingly infuriating way that children do. Then I got old and cynical, and realised that moving around was an extravagant waste of time better spent sitting down, and my daily exercise quotient was reduced to the five to six times daily sprint (well, plod) to the kitchen to make coffee. In the role-playing game of my life, 'Greater Indolence' is an epic level skill that dramatically diminishes the player's risk of undesirable things such as 'Meeting People' and 'Being Forced to Behave Nicely in Company'.

Anyway, as part of my ten-year plan to be more healthy (I quit smoking a year ago), I decided to get *Wii Fit*, a name which functions ingeniously as both a noun and an adjective. Wow, those guys in marketing are so smart!

The game features about 40 different exercises across four broad categories (Yoga, Muscle Workouts, Aerobics and Balance Games), although the initial set is limited to basic activities and most of the



good stuff is unlocked only with time and effort. Of course, you might legitimately declare, "Well, I can do all that stuff without this outrageously expensive game." Now, the diabolically clever thing about *Wii Fit* is that it's able to provide feedback. In the Yoga exercises, for example, the Balance Board constantly tracks and displays your weight distribution, so you know at a glance whether or not you're doing the poses correctly.

For the most part, the exercises are a lot of fun and genuinely taxing on feeble bodies like my own. I couldn't walk properly after the first week, but I'd managed to shed 1.2kg and my teeny biceps were in a permanent (and impressive) spasm from too much Rhythm Boxing. If you're looking to get in some exercise between *Team Fortress 2* and your next bag of crisps, look no further. **NAG**

Tarryn "The Amazing Talking Potato" van der Byl

¹ I'm still shopping for a publisher.

² Combined with the Facebook perk.



IT'S ALL FOREIGN

If your Wii console region is set to the United Kingdom (like mine), all measurements are expressed in those totally inscrutable Imperial units (ounces, pounds, feet, yards, Bengal). To change this to metric units, change the locale setting in the Wii Options menu to South Africa. It took me two days to figure this out, because I hadn't read the manual.

BALANCING ACT

Wii Fit would be totally rubbish without its bundled peripheral, the new Wii Balance Board. Developed over the course of three years, and packing a batch of pressure sensors able to measure all sorts of stuff about your weight, centre of gravity, body mass index and secret midnight peanut butter binges, the Balance Board is also set to star in a number of upcoming titles. I shall personally send a box of fancy biscuits to EA Canada if they agree to develop the next SSX game exclusively for the board. In the meantime, however, we can happily abuse the new peripheral with:

We Ski [Out now]
Boogie Superstar [Q3 2008]
Don King Presents: Prizefighter [Q3 2008]
Rayman Raving Rabbids 3 [T.B.A.]
Skate It [T.B.A.]
All-Star Cheer Squad [T.B.A.]

Since some of you are bound to secretly wonder, the board is built to support up to 300kg, although anything over 150kg is off the game's chart.



Being able to wish yourself into shape

Worse Than

Brutal physical endurance

PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

Far Far from

Being able to wish yourself into shape

Worse Than

Brutal physical endurance

PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

Bottom Line

Like having a personal trainer, but without all the sweaty indignity and gross showers of a public gym





WARNING : *Killer 3D Combo*



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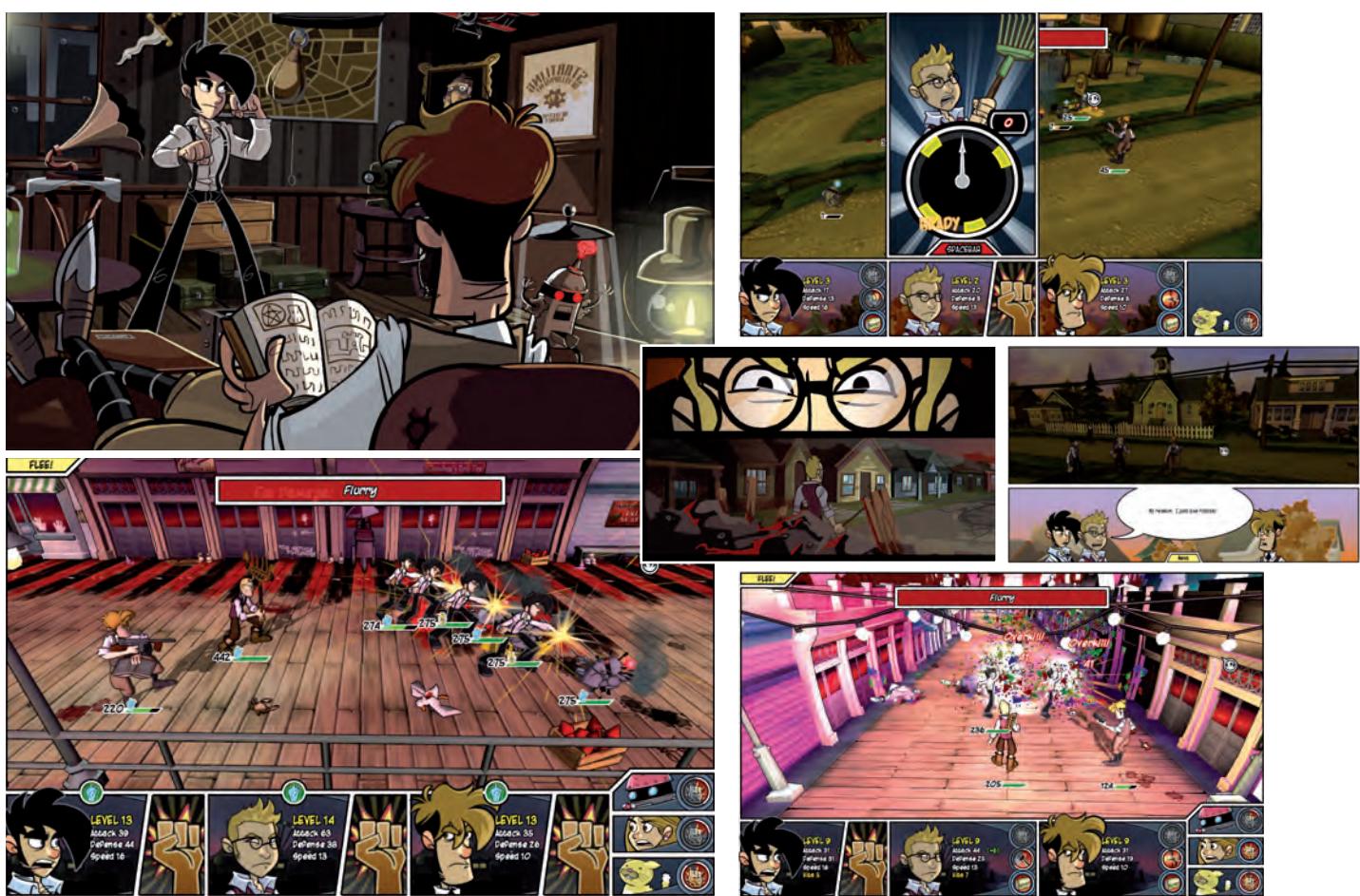
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PENNY ARCADE ADVENTURES: ON THE RAIN-SLICK PRECIPICE OF DARKNESS - EPISODE ONE*

BASICALLY, THE CREATORS OF the gaming-centric Web comic, *Penny Arcade*, Mike "Gabe" Krahulik and Jerry "Tycho" Holkins, sat down with Hothead Games (new to the scene) and Ron Gilbert (the guy responsible for *Maniac Mansion* and the first two *Monkey Island* games) and developed a game. It's episodic, with the first episode all about defeating the Mime-Pope, fortune-telling machines and fruit-fornicating robots.

The game uses a lot of the in-jokes, characters and nuances that made the Web comic as popular as it is today, but knowledge of the Web comic isn't required to enjoy *Episode One*. If anything, the game must seem infinitely more bizarre if you're not already used to its particular brand of humour.

Episode One is an adventure game with an RPG-style battle system. Roaming the environment is as simple as clicking where you want to go. Combat is a bit more involved but not overly complex. When a battle starts (usually by running into an enemy in the environment), the button for using an item from your inventory charges up. Once charged, you can use an item (such as throwing an orange to distract orange-molesting robots), but if you choose to not use an item, then your standard attack charges up. After the standard attack follows the special attack. This is an interesting twist on the regular RPG system and it works surprisingly well when you're

juggling three characters and three support characters, each with their own sets of buttons that charge up. It keeps the action fast but not unmanageable. Most enemy attacks can be blocked or countered by hitting the spacebar at the right time.

If two or more characters have special attacks charged up, they can initiate team-up attacks. Regular special attacks actually use mini-games to determine their effectiveness: Gabe's special moves involve mashing the spacebar repeatedly to fill a bar; your character requires timing on button presses to hit the right zones; and Tycho is about hitting the right sequence of buttons in the time allotted.

Getting a successful special attack right can have devastating effects, such as turning a mime into an exploding meat-fountain. As you progress, the characters gain levels and improved special attacks.

There is an interesting novelty to the character-creation system in *Episode One*, in which you design your character by swapping the mouth, eyes, torso, feet, etc. by cycling through a bunch of options for each. While the game itself is 3D and all the characters therein, the animated cutscenes - employed to great effect at critical points in the game - are two-dimensional and even have a 2D representation of your character in them.

As an 'episodic game', *Episode One* includes



a good amount of content for your twenty dollars, with the frilly bits including locked concept art, music and character biographies. If there were an award for the game with the best 'Alt-Tab' support in the world, *Episode One* would receive that prize. **NAG**

Miktar Dracon

Ninja Babies
For fans of
1-855-MY-NINJA
Anachronox [PC] from Another Dimension

PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB



Bottom Line

Warning: This game contains a lot of swearing and hobo abuse.

89
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TO SLEEPE, PERCHANCE TO DREAME

The Xbox version of the game includes three Skullbagger achievements for collecting a number of skulls hidden away in the villages of Darkwater, Holdenfort, Caldberg and Thornvik. Lest you weep bitter tears of disappointment, make sure you nab these before launching your full-scale Viking invasions of those areas.

THINGS FALL APART

The best thing about *Viking* is the fatalities, not least of all because all it takes is a single button press to unleash bloody vengeance (developer Creative Assembly is apparently all about bringing accessible violence to the masses). And not just any bloody vengeance: *Viking* revels in glorious total-body dismemberment. See your enemies come apart in ways that nature never intended!



VIKING: BATTLE FOR ASGARD

LOKI'S WAYWARD DAUGHTER HEL has been chucked out of Asgard - the glittery Ikea-furnished realm of the gods - for defying Odin. Somewhat disgruntled, the stroppy cow decides to march her Dread Legion upon Midgard, while she seeks out her brother, the world-devouring wolf Fenrir, snarling herald of the apocalyptic Ragnarok and a card-carrying hand fetishist. Together - so the plan goes - they will usher in tyranny and perpetual winter, claiming Midgard as their own, enslaving mankind, and teaching those airy snobs up in Asgard a lesson they won't soon forget. Meanwhile, Odin's wife and internationally accredited Goddess of War, Freya, has found herself a mortal champion - Skarin, a great, big, blonde beefcake with great, big, leather-bound fury boots and little to no capacity for critical evaluation ("LOL, THE GODS WOULD TOTALLY NEVER USE ME FOR THEIR OWN NEFER ... NEFIR ... NERFAR ... BAD PURPOSES ROFL"). The ad-hoc hero is promptly handed some sort of fancy teleportation stone and dispatched to save the world with an assortment of button-mashing combos, dragons, inscrutable visions and not much else.

Well, that's about as much as I could surmise anyway, given the grotesque

mangling of Norse mythology*, and an almost total lack of storytelling and character development. Which is a shame, as the newly immortal Skarin has all the rippling triceps and angst-ridden trappings to become an iconic brawler-of-the-gods alongside Kratos, and Norse mythology is steeped in the sort of revolting, gruesome stuff that makes videogames so much irresponsible fun.

But missed opportunities and its madly repetitive trudge-trudge-mash-mash-kill gameplay notwithstanding, *Viking: Battle for Asgard* isn't abysmal. The game is almost ludicrously simple, making it an easy-out option for an afternoon of mostly forgettable slaughter when you're bored of everything else. And, well, it's got Vikings. Our berserker friends from the cold North are so scandalously under-represented in popular culture. Well, at least until *Too Human* is released in August. **NAG**

Tarryn "Skarin em ek, þróttigr viking!" van der Byl

* I broke out in hives when the village seer, Asta, named Odin's fabled ravens Hugin ("Thought") and Muninn ("Memory") as Hugin and Mugin (both mispronounced), and not as ravens, but dragons. Snorri Sturluson must be breakdancing in his grave.

Pretending to be a Viking



PC

360

PS3

WII

PS2

PSP

DS

MOB

Kinda like
Worse Than



Being a real Viking, because that would totally rule



Bottom Line

Second-rate God of War with Vikings. An additional five points were awarded for the totally awesome dismemberments.





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Jump in.





IRON MAN

GAMES BASED ON BLOCKBUSTER movies are getting better, it seems. However, we're still not at the point where they can generally be called "good." With fewer of these games being produced than before, it is still a case of producers passing the games on to inexperienced developers, to help them build up a bit of experience and at least get a couple of titles under their belts. Naturally, the intellectual properties used for these games guarantee sales, no matter how bad they are, but they do seem to be getting a bit better with each outing. Just a bit, mind you.

Iron Man starts out with the best of intentions and, for the first few minutes, looks like a potentially fun title. The player controls Iron Man and takes on a host of enemies. The hordes of bad guys that the game throws at you can be taken care of quickly and effectively; although the weapons don't feel punchy enough from the word go. And, naturally, the game is pretty to look at.

After a few levels, though, it becomes evident that the developers had decided on an idea they liked, concerning level structure, and stuck with it. The levels are all wide-open spaces that can be flown around (and the flying bit is fun), with clusters of enemies dotted around the place. Every level ends with some kind of boss battle. They are so similar that they become something of a blur after a while.

And then, the difficulty curve kicks in with dramatic effect.

The word "curve" is not entirely accurate. Perhaps "difficulty spike" would be better, or even "difficulty brick wall." The game gets very hard, very fast. While the player can combat this dramatic increase in challenge by altering, upgrading and modifying the Iron Man suit, it just gets frustrating. After spending a few hours lazily flying around beating up bad guys, suddenly getting trounced by swarms of them makes for a 'no fun' kind of situation.

Iron Man also features a few special moves. The player can catch and redirect missiles (an almost impossible task which requires absolutely precise timing) and can grapple big enemies like tanks and planes. This latter idea is fun, but the animations are repeated endlessly, and the effectiveness of the attack is not greater than, say, pounding the stuffing out of the big, bad guy instead.

Iron Man started out with all the right ideas, but something went amiss. Had the game been three levels long, it would have been great, albeit a little short. However, any modicum of inventiveness that might have peeked out at the beginning of the title is quickly squashed when the game becomes a monotonous slugfest. Even the ramped-up difficulty doesn't do anything to remedy the situation; it just gets harder to play, not more interesting.

Nevertheless, despite its faults, *Iron Man* is, for the 'movie-game' genre, a step in the right direction. It shows more thought than previous adaptations of this kind, and hopefully points to better things to come. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius

Having no new games at all

Better Than



PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

Most new games available

Worse Than



Y \$ ☀

Bottom Line

This might have been a great game, but it falls apart after a while.

50 OUT OF 100

ASUS Splendid MA3850M

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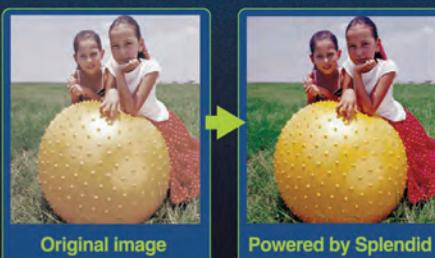
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and dynamic contrast engine of the powerful chip. Additionally, it automatically selects the best possible display modes with inclusions of a Photo Mode, Video Mode, and Game Mode.

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TURNING POINT: FALL OF LIBERTY

TURNING POINT: FALL OF LIBERTY starts out with a great idea and a stirring sequence (if you're a Yank). In real life, a taxi hit Winston Churchill when he was a young man, forcing him to walk with a cane for the rest of his life. *Turning Point* alters history and asks the question: "What would have happened if Churchill hadn't survived the accident and could therefore not have lead the Allies to victory over Nazi Germany during World War II?"

The idea is intriguing: a full-scale Nazi invasion of the USA during the early 1950s would have had very interesting results. Sadly, the idea is the only thing about this game that is remotely good.

From the very start, atop a skyscraper under construction, the game presents the player with levels that are linear and poorly conceptualised. Combined with an unforgiving and rather stingy save-point system, the game gets boring and frustrating rather quickly. An AI that is rotten, combined with graphical glitches and technical hiccups, makes it tedious. A market that is full of top-notch first person shooters makes it pointless.

Turning Point's myriad problems become obvious very early on in the game. Aside from a few impressive in-game movies and

a hint or two at the greater situation, the storyline is very weak. The development of the player's character is equally weak, because it is nonexistent. The action is stilted and feels forced at the best of times, with throngs of truly idiotic enemies being thrown at the player in lieu of anything remotely original.

The game does feature environmental kills that, at first, seem like fun, but after you have thrown your seventh Nazi off a building, or drowned yet another bad guy in a toilet, the shine wears off.

Turning Point: Fall of Liberty does all the wrong things, and never rises above the level of plodding tedium and poor conceptualisation. The action is monotonous, with a lot of repetition brought on by the sparse smattering of checkpoints the game uses for saving. Later stages get even worse, featuring the kind of devolution in quality that makes one wonder if the developers ran out of ideas or were pressed for time.

With top-notch first-person shooters becoming common, games such as this just don't make the grade. The shoddy technical approach, along with the completely uninspiring story, levels and action, really don't compete on any level. It is surprising

that Codemasters, which has a reputation for releasing good games, even released this title. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius

Worse Than	Virtually any other console FPS		
	PC	360	PS3
	WII	PS2	PSP
Far Fans of	Masochism	DS	MOB
♂	pool	🎮	
Bottom Line			
The core concept is good, but entirely wasted in this uninspiring game.			
40 OUT OF 100			

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JUST FLIGHT EXPANSIONS FOR MS FLIGHT SIMULATOR

SINCE THE RELEASE OF Microsoft Flight Simulator, development of third-party add-ons has been possible because of the open-source code and comprehensive SDK releases over the years.

We take a look at five expansion packs from Just Flight

for Microsoft Flight Simulator 2004 and Microsoft Flight Simulator X. The expansions require MS Flight Simulator to be installed on your PC. **NAG**

Sean James



F-117A STEALTH FIGHTER

First flown in 1975 under a veil of secrecy, the Stealth Fighter is still considered cutting-edge technology. With the F-117A Stealth Fighter Expansion Pack, you'll be able to enjoy the thrills of controlling the F-117A on your PC. Key features of this expansion pack include accurate 3D modelling and excellent flight dynamics. Most flight systems have been coded and moving parts animated. The aircraft's quite difficult to master and will challenge your flying skills. **[R394]**



AIRBUS COLLECTION

The Airbus Collection comprises three A300 derivatives including the massive Beluga, used to transport the fuselages of Airbus aircraft from one assembly plant to another. Eighteen liveries are included with countless more available for free from most reputable FS download sites. The 3D modelling and textures are superbly rendered, with dynamic shine and a level of accuracy that challenges the default offering in FS. The virtual cockpit is a bit disappointing, but the 2D instrument panel compensates for this with crisp textures and good night lighting. **[R394]**



SPACE SHUTTLE

This expansion offers you the chance to fly the Space Shuttle from re-entry to landing. The expansion offers phenomenal 3D rendering and fist-class animation. Unfortunately, it won't hold your attention for long. **[R394]**



737 PILOT IN COMMAND

The 737 is arguably the most recognisable aircraft in the sky the world over. This expansion pack boasts an impressive list of features, including a working FMS (flight management system) and animated control surfaces. The flight dynamics are as accurate as anything I have experienced. The flight deck is a bit on the bland side, but functions well. **[R456]**



FLYING CLUB X

This expansion pack caught my attention and also proved to be the most frustrating. The thing would just not install on my PC. I had to test it on a friend's PC. The package includes five of the world's most popular private aircraft, including the Schweizer 300 helicopter. Also included are the C152, Tomahawk, Warrior and Senica. **[R394]**

 Better Than	 The default aircraft	PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS MOB
		 For Fans of

Bottom Line
Flying Club X is the best value-for-money offering.

78
OUT OF 100



DRAGON BALL Z: BURST LIMIT

RRP → R699 | Publisher → Atari | Distributor → Megarom | Genre → Fighting | Age Rating → 12+

BURST LIMIT IS THE first next-gen *DBZ* and its combat system is based on the *Budokai*-series combat system (like *Tekken*), not the *Tenkaichi* system (which involved flying around in the third person). The combat in *Burst Limit* refines the already sharp series combat further, with precise timing and much button mashing – which is fun.

New to the system are the Drama Pieces, of which you select three before battle. You gain Drama Pieces by unlocking them in the expanded single-player campaign that follows the *DBZ* story arc, but you have to complete certain hidden objectives during each fight. These objectives usually follow the story in some way, such as a particular

fight that includes the Kamehameha special attack as seen in the animated series. Performing the same attack at that point in the game and fighting the same character gain you a Drama Piece that plays out almost as the show did.

Drama Pieces are activated during battle when a certain condition is met, such as when your character takes a lot of damage or is hit by a certain attack. The Drama Piece activates and a mini cut-scene unfolds, changing the tide of battle in some way.

Fans of the game series looking to upgrade can finally stop whining and cursing *Naruto* fans for getting such good games, but if you've never been a fan of the *DBZ*

games in the first place, it is doubtful that *Burst Limit* will make you go Super Saiyan in the pants. **NAG**

Miktar Dracon

PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS MOB



Bottom Line

Another solid addition to the series.



THE SETTLERS: RISE OF AN EMPIRE – THE EASTERN REALM

RRP → R199 | Publisher → Ubisoft | Distributor → Megarom | Genre → Strategy | Age Rating → 12+ | PC Spec → 1 2 3 4 5

AS MENTIONED IN OUR review of *The Settlers: Rise of an Empire*, the franchise has come a long way. *The Eastern Realm* is an expansion pack, officially labelled as a "mission pack," but offers a bit more than just new scenarios. Several small but significant elements have been added, enhancing the game experience. For example, it is now possible to send the knight to a depleted mine in order to summon a geologist for a fee. The geologist will eventually arrive, and find new deposits. Each time this function is used on a particular mine or quarry, the associated gold cost increases. Geologists can also refill wells (also a new feature), which can be dug in any territory in order to provide access to fresh water, thus obviating the need for water to be laboriously lugged out to outlying areas. Both of these features improve the enjoyment value of the game. New knights have been added, as well as

new single-player game villains. Speaking of single player, a new campaign is offered. This is challenging and fairly lengthy, adding significant value to the game.

The graphics is as they are in *Rise of an Empire*, which is to say gorgeous. The style may not appeal to everyone, but is likely to be enjoyed by people who enjoy this sort of slower-paced strategy title. There is, however, an incongruity. The setting is akin to the Middle to Far East, including India. Though the territories are fictional, they and their peoples are certainly modelled on those particular real-world regions. Yet, the style of the buildings has not changed. There are occasional features scattered around the map that suggest an Oriental flavour, but the towns retain a distinctly European look. On the upside, some new animals have been added to the landscape, and have been quite charmingly

animated – particularly the zebras.

Some quirks persist though. For instance, it would have been nice to see an auto-save feature, particularly as a small misstep can lead to defeat in a mission – and missions are generally quite long! Overall, however, this one gets a thumbs-up, if you are a fan of the slower strategy/town-building genre. **NAG**

Alex Jelagin

PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS MOB



Bottom Line

A worthy expansion pack for the series.



TIME FOR SOME DEDICATION

IT'S ALWAYS EASY TO criticise goods and services that are supplied locally and, like most South Africans, I enjoy getting irate about how I feel slighted by this or that or the other. But sometimes these arguments are valid and should be listened to, not as slating criticism, but rather as constructive criticism that can be useful, rather than destructive.

Take, for example, the delivery of mobile games in this country. There are those out there who realise the potential of these products, and who do their utmost to ensure the best service possible. But these tend to be smaller operators, and are often little-known entities within the industry, despite their best efforts.

The bulk of the responsibility lies with the three major cellular service providers who, by and large, seem to take the attitude that games are products that will sell themselves with a minimum of effort. They couldn't be more wrong.

Buying a mobile game is easy and generally cheap, but the real truth of it is that R50 is still R50, and very few people are willing to blindly give that kind of money away for a product that they know little about.

The major service providers have means at their disposal to change that, should they wish. In truth, a service providing information about the games that they have on sale would be simple to set up (in terms of content) and could be delivered directly to the handsets of those who want it. An Internet solution also works, and already exists, but the convenience of using a cellphone for this kind of exercise cannot be discounted.

Globally, mobile gaming has shown itself to be a powerful and lucrative market. Provision of excellent quality information would go far, and would serve the gaming industry as a whole, not just the mobile gaming community. Mobile gaming, after all, leads to other gaming. The mobile service providers that operate in South Africa need to take a leaf out of the books of various international companies, and develop a little dedication to the mobile gaming market.

It is high time for an overhaul of the provision of mobile games locally by the service providers. This exercise would prove lucrative not only to them, but to the smaller companies who are desperately trying to improve the situation locally.

Well, at least we have NAG to tell us about the games. It's a good start.



APPLE A THREAT TO DS?

American media company *Forbes* has released a report that places the Apple iPhone and iPod in a strong position to threaten the Nintendo DS handheld gaming system. The launch of the Apple App Store, which allows third-party developers to sell iPhone and iPod touch applications to end-users, is the main source of this speculation.

One of the main strengths highlighted by *Forbes* is the fact Apple hardware combines both touch-screen capabilities as well as motion-sensing accelerometers. While this does give Apple an advantage, the popularity of the DS still stands out, and the determining factor will more than likely be the games available for the two platforms. However, Apple's download delivery system for the iPhone, as well as the iPod's massive market penetration and iTunes Store, will make the task of getting games to consumers very easy.

With the high regard with which the DS is held as a demographic-spanning system, as well as the fact that over 70 million DS consoles have been sold worldwide, Apple's task is certainly going to be a difficult one. If nothing else, the result will be that console manufacturers will need to investigate in alternative product delivery systems to combat Apple's strategies.



TWIN LEGEND INCOMING

ORANGEPIXEL HAS ANNOUNCED ITS new vertical shooter, *Twin Legend*, which will combine the appeal of a great story, easy controls and a continuous play option with locked achievements and variable difficulty modes.

Based on the style used by coin-operated arcade classics such as *Xenon* and *Galaga*, *Twin Legend* will feature eight levels set in four different worlds. The story will be told through the use of 'cartoon' intermissions, and players will be able to access and upload high scores and locked achievements from RumbleX.com. The package will be tied up with a pleasing 'retro' sound track.

HANCOCK TO HIT MOBILE

ADDING TO THE EVER-GROWING throng of movie-based games available for mobile phones, Glu Mobile has announced that it will be producing a title based on the new Will Smith movie, *Hancock*. Starring Smith and Charlize Theron, *Hancock* tells the story of a superhero who has fallen on hard times, and begins having a relationship with the wife of the PR agent who is supposed to help him resurrect his career.

Very few details have been released about the game, but it is safe to assume that it will be an action-platform game, with puzzles thrown in, and not a relationship guide.

SONIC THE HANDHELD HERO

SEGA MOBILE HAS ANNOUNCED that, since its launch in early 2006, *Sonic the Hedgehog* mobile game has enjoyed in excess of eight million downloads in North America and Europe.

"*Sonic the Hedgehog* is a title that resonates with a universal audience of gamers who have grown up with the franchise, as well as with a growing audience of casual players," said Linda Chaplin, vice president of SEGA Mobile. "Sonic has appeared in more than 40 games [and] on 19 videogame platforms. The mobile platform has been a great extension for the franchise, allowing fans and casual players alike to pick up a truly classic game and experience it all over again on their mobile phones."

The title was originally launched exclusively on the US Verizon Wireless network, before becoming available in the rest of the world.

"*Sonic the Hedgehog* is extremely appealing to our V CAST audience," said Todd Murphy, director of Mobile Web, games and applications for Verizon. "*Sonic* has made a substantial contribution to our multimedia sales over the past two years, and we

look forward to continually working with SEGA to deliver its classic games and new properties to mobile users everywhere."

And deliver it shall, with three new properties in the series planned for release this year: *Sonic at the Olympic Games*, *Sonic Spinball* and *Sonic the Hedgehog 2*.



IPHONE 3G



ON 9 JUNE, APPLE introduced the iPhone 3G, a new mobile handset that incorporates all the features of the original iPhone, but with 3G networking functionality that's supposedly twice as fast as that of the original. "Just one year after launching the iPhone, we're launching the new iPhone 3G that is twice as fast at half the price," said Steve Jobs, Apple's CEO. "iPhone 3G supports Microsoft Exchange ActiveSync right out of the box, runs the incredible third-party apps created with the iPhone SDK, and will be available in more than 70 countries around the world this year." iPhone 3G supports Wi-Fi, EDGE and 3G networking and switches between them on the fly, allowing for the fastest possible download speeds at any given time. The handset allows for simultaneous data and voice communications, meaning that you could browse the Web, use the GPS receiver, which is built into the handset, to get your bearings and have a

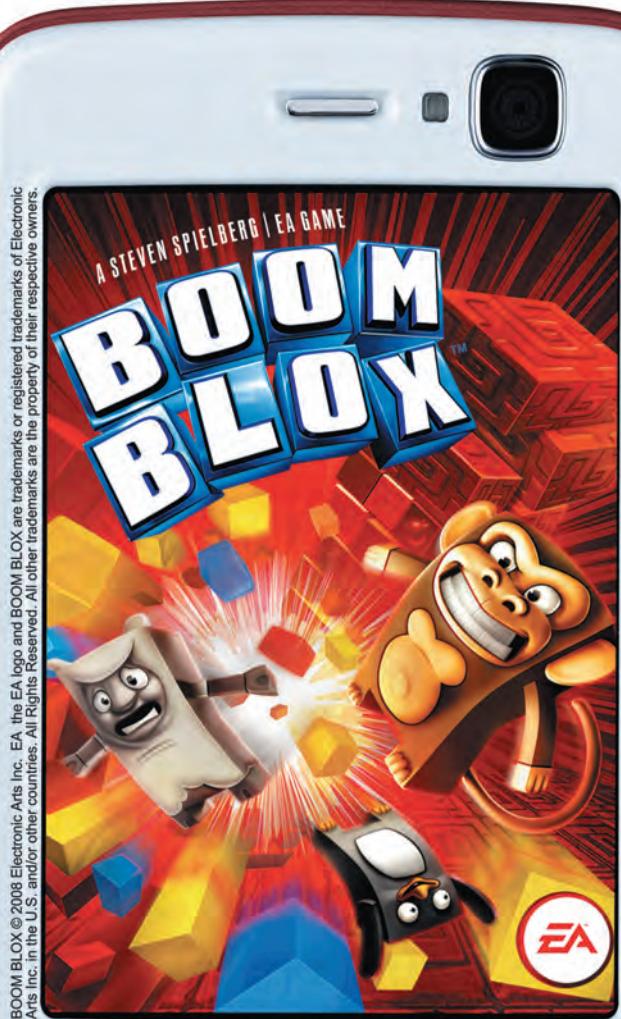
conversation with your mom, all at once. As Mr Jobs mentioned, the handset supports any third-party applications created using the iPhone SDK, and applications can be downloaded from the App Store, a service that allows users to purchase (though there are a few that are free) native iPhone applications. Other features include the aforementioned GPS technology, Apple's Multi-Touch user interface, MobileMe (an Internet service that pushes e-mail, contacts and calendars to native applications on the iPhone, iPod touch, Macs and PCs), an accelerometer to track the phone's physical movements and many more features too numerous to list here. The phone is due to be available in approximately 70 countries by the end of the year, but is currently only available in 22 countries, one of which is South Africa! Just kidding, you know better than that...

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NAG



BLOCK BREAKER DELUXE 2



RRP→ R50
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Genre→ Action Arcade
Download→ SMS Nag071 to 40978

GAMEROFT HAS A PENCHANT for creating good games. While they hardly ever push the envelope in terms of creative licence, the titles that they do produce are normally refined and well received. Take for example *Block Breaker 2 Deluxe*. This package basically screams 'formulaic' with its plethora of game modes, power-ups and unlocks.

So what do you get for fifty bucks? An *Arkanoid*, but with pizzazz! Yes, there is a paddle that is used to bounce a ball. Yes, this ball in turn destroys obstructing blocks. Yes, there is a range of positive and negative power-ups to be collected or avoided. But what about bricks that aren't all rectangular and don't just remain static? Instead, on certain levels they twirl, rotate or shift depending on how your ball interacts with them. What about five extra game modes as well as a multiplayer option, which allows you to play cooperatively with a friend on the same phone? What about a shop where you can purchase upgrades?

It's difficult to point a critical finger at *Block Breaker 2 Deluxe*. **NAG**

Rory Smith-Belton



PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS MOB



Bottom Line

A mobile must-have.

92
OUT OF 100

MERCENARIES 2

RRP→ R50
Publisher→ I-Play
Genre→ Action
Download→ SMS Nag076 to 40978

VENEZUELA IS A BEAUTIFUL country. It's a pity that it's often featured as being some kind of Third World banana republic. *Mercenaries 2* is no different. Playing as Mattias, a gun-wielding, hand grenade-throwing, C-4-planting mercenary madman, you hire out your skills to whoever greases your bank account.

Our first impression of *Mercenaries* was naively favourable. We thought that the amber monochrome title screen conveyed a classy and polished feel. Seriously, looks are important! Then there were the subtle features that made the game flow a little smoother, such as auto-aiming and auto-firing. Yes, that's right. You don't even need to fire your weapon. Your phone does it for you!

However, we changed our minds within the first five minutes of gameplay. Obstinate, Mattias cannot move diagonally and has very limited access to weaponry for a self-confessed dealer of death. Neither gripe is as annoying, though, as a buggy clipping path. Whether you've been playing for two minutes or two hours, nobody likes to replay a level simply because they found themselves trapped outside the playing area. This is especially true if you weren't even trying to do something stupid.

It's a pity that *Mercenaries 2* does the franchise a disservice. The mobile platform really could've done with a few more explosions. **NAG**

Rory Smith-Belton



PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS MOB



Bottom Line

More buggy than a bottle of tequila

45
OUT OF 100

THE SIMS 2 CASTAWAY

RRP→ R50
Publisher→ Electronic Arts
Genre→ Adventure
Download→ SMS Nag073 to 40978

IT IS SMALL WONDER that EA has pushed its fabulously successful *Sims 2* franchise onto the mobile platform. Thankfully, this is a game that is better than expected.

The Sims 2 Castaway is very similar to the PC version with the same name, although the player has less to do and fewer options (quite understandable, of course).

Quite simply, the player is required to help a Sim survive on an island after getting stranded there. The island is surprisingly well populated right from the word go, and the player needs to perform a number of interactions early on in the game.

The whole thing is really little more than a task-driven adventure title, but, as is generally the case with EA mobile games, it is very good indeed. The graphics is top notch, although the large character means that very little of the game world is visible at any given time. The controls are wonderfully simple, making use of a context-sensitive cursor, much like *The Sims 2* on PC.

The Sims 2 Castaway will keep mobile gamers busy for some time, as it's an entertaining and fairly long game. It's not action packed or massively exciting, but then again, it's not meant to be that kind of game. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius



PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS MOB



Bottom Line

An enjoyable title for Sims and adventure fans alike.

80
OUT OF 100

win a Wii!

mobile game

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BURNOUT

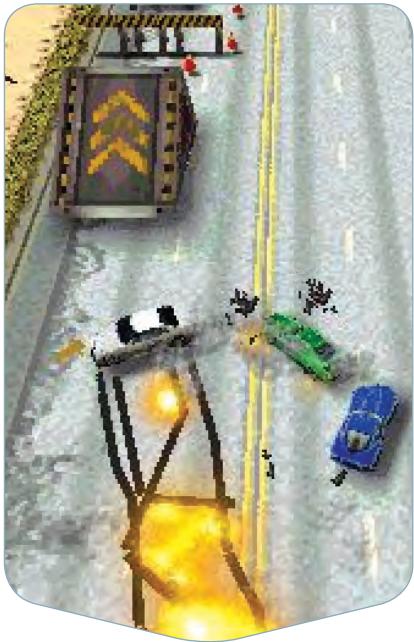
RRP→ R30
Publisher→ Electronic Arts
Genre→ Racing
Download→ SMS Nag074 to 40978

ONE OF THE GREAT things about playing games on the mobile platform is that the older, retro games are kept alive, thanks to the somewhat limited capabilities of the majority of mobile devices. Take, as an excellent example, *Burnout*. EA's irresponsible and massively enjoyable driving simulator makes its way onto mobile phones in the form of a top-down, vertical-scrolling racer. The roads are all dead straight, and everything is seen from directly above, almost like the original *GTA* titles on PC. But this format works perfectly for the game: it is not about cornering perfectly or anything remotely like that. Instead, it's about causing vehicular carnage.

Various different events, based on taking opponents down or slamming into civilian traffic, are all available to the player, although the variety and differences between them aren't massive. Still, the action is thoroughly addictive and fast paced, supported by clear graphics and a simple control scheme that can be managed from the keypad with ease.

Burnout brings a classic format to a modern platform with as much grace and aplomb as a game about crashing cars on purpose can. Racing fans may jeer at its simplicity, but it is exactly this simplicity that makes it such a great game. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius



PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS MOB



Bottom Line

A great retro-style racer full of mayhem and mishaps.

82
OUT OF 100

MY HAPPY PLANET

RRP→ R50
Publisher→ I-Play
Genre→ Arcade
Download→ SMS Nag077 to 40978

OUR WORLD IS DYING. Every second is another one towards the end of our planet, and we seem quite intent on happily speeding our way towards that extinction. What can be done to avert this catastrophe? Shall we destroy our huge stockpile of nuclear weapons? Nope! Nothing so fancy. Rather, let's all get a little green and clean this place up.

My Happy Planet is a rather strange attempt at mobile gaming edutainment. The player's job is to act as a type of cosmic doctor. Essentially, this title is a collection of eight mini-games that focus on issues such as recycling, forest fires, solar power and methane gas production. The latter involves plugging bovine bums with corks shot from a cannon. Oh yes, you can have a laugh while learning. There are bronze, silver and gold medals to be won for each event, which will unlock the next event as well as an interesting conservation fact.

But is it good? *My Happy Planet* serves as an adequate time waster. The graphics is cute, the difficulty low and the information free. If it means that one person stops to think about their carbon footprint, maybe that's enough. **NAG**

Rory Smith-Belton



PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS MOB



Bottom Line

Learning can be fun.

70
OUT OF 100

TETRIS: BLOCKOUT

RRP→ R50
Publisher→ Electronic Arts
Genre→ Puzzle
Download→ SMS Nag075 to 40978

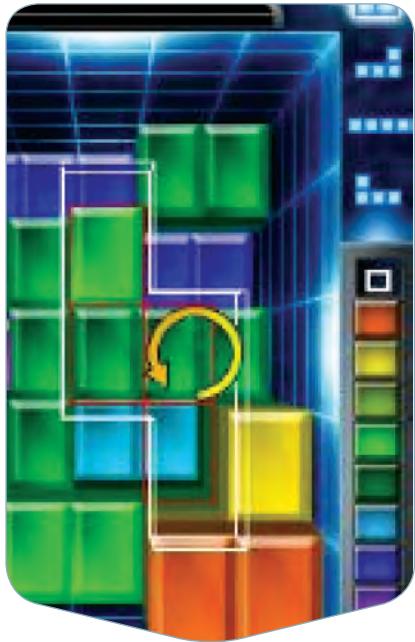
TETRIS LAUNCHED A GENRE of block-based puzzle games that has been transformed, translated and redesigned countless times. But the fundamentals of *Tetris* have pretty much stayed the same for all the years that it has been in existence.

Tetris Blockout takes the whole idea to a new level, though, and the revamp of the original game is both welcome and brilliant. With the limited 3D capabilities of phones, it has nonetheless been possible to take *Tetris* and change it from a 2D puzzle to a 3D one, with blocks that can be rotated in all directions, and must be placed to form full 'levels' to eliminate them.

The game is a little disorientating at first, but once the player has managed to get their bearings with the new approach to *Tetris*, it is a wonderfully challenging and addictive title that will keep any puzzle fan busy for hours on end.

Thankfully, the new way of thinking and approaching the puzzles is counterbalanced by a relatively simple control scheme. The graphics is necessarily simplified, with blocks being presented in wire-frames before they are dropped, purely to allow the player to recognise their orientation. Puzzle fans should not miss this one. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius



PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS MOB



Bottom Line

An excellent new take on the traditional *Tetris* idea.

90
OUT OF 100

NAG

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CRUSADER SERIES

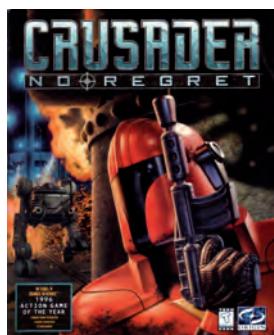
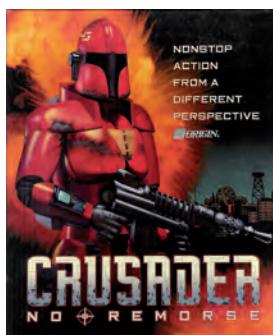
THE YEAR IS 2196. Like all self-respecting visions of the future, it's a bleak and dystopian one. The planet groans in the tyrannical grip of the World Economic Consortium, a sort of mega-conglomerate lorded over by the insidious (and unseen) President Gauthier and his trusty toady, Nathaniel Draygan. However, much like all self-respecting visions of a bleak and dystopian future, there's a faction of sullen dissidents holding out against the evil empire - the imaginatively named Resistance, headed by former WEC colonel, Quentin Maxis.

You are a Silencer, one of the WEC's elite super soldiers, genetically engineered to be a full-time professional badass. After allowing a mob of rebels to escape, you and your Silencer pals are marked for correctional assassination by your disgruntled employers. Understandably indignant, you sign up with the Resistance over at Echo Base, and grab yourself some righteous revenge - mostly by tripping alarms, blowing stuff up and murdering innocent bystanders. Hurrah!

Isometric¹ gaming is now little more than an oblique and often overlooked (get it?) blip on the videogame timeline, but back in 1995, Origin Systems' *Crusader: No Remorse* was on the bleeding edge of visual technology. Using a heavily modified version of *Ultima VIII: Pagan's*

BANNED!

On 27 March 1997, *Crusader: No Remorse* joined the illustrious ranks of those materials deemed subversive and inappropriate by the German censors, when it was added to the infamous index of the Bundesprüfstelle für jugendgefährdende Medien (Federal Department for Media Harmful to Young Persons). This rendered all sales of the game to minors illegal. Recent additions to this list of infamy include *Chill Con Carnage*, *F.E.A.R.*, *Stranglehold*, *The Darkness* and *Crackdown*. Actually, pretty much everything is on that list.



engine, *No Remorse* and its sort-of-sequel, sort-of-expansion *No Regret* (1996) offered eight-directional movement, destructible environments, and such marvellous explosions that a menu option was included to downgrade them in case your 66MHz i486 DX2 couldn't push all those pixels. Both games also used those low-budget, abysmally enacted, and unintentionally hilarious full-motion video sequences that were all the rage back then. **NAG**

Tarryn van der Byl

¹ Although most games referred to as isometric were, in fact, trimetric. Fact!



GREAT GREEN GOBS OF GREASY GRIMY GOPHER GUTS

Both *Crusader* games were relentlessly, abundantly, and gloriously gruesome. While you might simply tote around a drab, standard-issue, .40-calibre semi-automatic pistol, a range of about 15 other weapons offered eminently more colourful solutions to life. The BK-16 "Crystallizer," for example, would freeze your opponent, leaving you to finish the job in any way you please - mostly by reducing the unlucky victim to chunky bits on the nice carpets. The XP-5 "Broiler" microwave projector rifle, meanwhile, would quite literally cook your enemies where they stood, crisping away all their flesh to leave behind a scrumptious carcass just this side of medium rare. There was also a small arsenal of explosive deployable items, including scuttling spider bombs, electronic disruptors and limpet mines.

UNMASKED!

Although the Silencer remained resolutely unnamed throughout the series, it was possible to catch a glimpse of the enigmatic man beneath all that carbon fibre. With a bit of fancy footwork, you could catch him in an explosion powerful enough to knock off his stylish, red Boba Fett helmet and reveal a pale-skinned blonde man.

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Q&A: GHOSTBUSTERS: THE VIDEO GAME

Last month we ran a short preview on Ghostbusters: The Video Game, which was supposed to include this Q&A session with someone at the development studio. As you might remember from the previous issue, the answers didn't arrive in time for the June issue, so we were forced to move the Q&A to this issue. Why should you care? Well, we really don't know. It just felt like we had to come up with an excuse. It's either this or coming up with something creative here and that's just not happening when the subject matter is a month old and we've moved onto other things. We did get a few new screens and some extra artwork, so enjoy.



Pitch the game in twenty words or less.
Finally, an authentic *Ghostbusters* gameplay experience! This new epic returns the original Ghostbusters crew to NYC with all the laughs, scares and action!

What aspect of the game are you most excited about, and what are you doing to make the game appeal beyond the strength of its licence and the Ghostbusters characters?

We have worked very hard to deliver an immersive, authentic experience that will truly make the player feel as if he or she is the new member of the Ghostbusters team. The action may be a little 'bigger' than that of the films, but the heart is definitely there.

What was the biggest challenge in developing a new *Ghostbusters* game?

Almost everything is iconic and people are very sensitive to how you treat characters that they have very fond memories of. We very carefully evaluate everything we do to make sure that it fits in the Ghostbusters universe and is true to the characters, and everything goes through Dan Aykroyd and Harold Ramis for authenticity approval.

How will the Proton Packs and Ghost Trapper work this time around with modern-day technology? Will they be revamped at all?

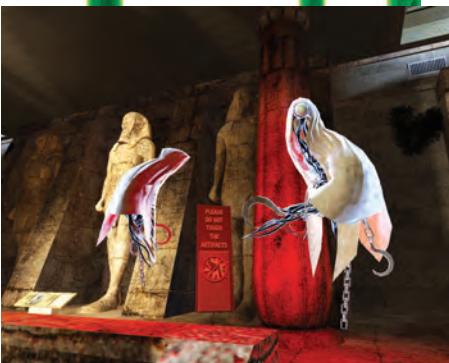
The game is set in New York City in 1991, only two years after the events depicted in *Ghostbusters II*. So, Ghostbusters' technology has reasonably advanced to fit the period.

We were careful to follow the 'DIY', off-the-shelf aesthetic depicted in the films, so everything still looks a little cobbled together.

Of course, Egon and Ray have been busy and improvements have been made. Tobin's Spirit Guide and the Ghostbusters Field Manual have been transferred to electronic docs and integrated into the PKE Meter. The original Muon traps have been modified to hold more than a single ghost. The Containment Grid in the basement now sports a viewing panel, so incarcerated ghosts can be observed more easily.

Throughout the game, Egon continues to make further enhancements to the Ghostbusting technology. The player, hired as a semi-expendable 'Experimental Equipment Technician', tests all the new equipment in the field before the other Ghostbusters adopt it.





Will we get a chance to cross the streams?

Crossing the streams is very bad and results in full protonic reversal (as everyone knows). Why would anyone want to do that?

What happens when you cross the streams? Would it be hard to create the graphics for life as you know it stopping instantaneously and every molecule in your body exploding at the speed of light?

No, that part's easy.

Can your Infernal Engine render five tons of melted marshmallow man swathed across lower Manhattan in real time? What else can it do?

The Infernal Engine really is amazing technology and we are thrilled to be using it to bring *Ghostbusters* to life. It can give us indoors, outdoors, enormous crowds, thousands of physical objects, massive destruction, unbelievable lighting, any variety of glowing, dripping and swirling ghosts... And, yes, tons and tons of marshmallow.

The Infernal Engine is unique in how easily it can deliver the same intense physics gameplay across five platforms (with RedFly doing the PS2 and Wii). Having

a solid engine right from day one has really allowed the team to focus on the gameplay and creating the experience.

No co-op? That blows. Four guys on a couch, busting ghosts – that's solid gold. It must have sucked taking it out.

There is co-op in multiplayer. We just don't have it for the single-player campaign. It became clear early on that to sell the experience of you being a member of the original Ghostbusters team, you had to witness all of the banter between the original members. In order to do that effectively, we had to maintain control of the comedic timing and overall team size, which made us decide to wait pursuing co-op.

Any management options such as from the old Commodore 64 version where you ran the Ghostbusters as a company. It'd be cool to buy more of those Ghostbusters cars. We wanted one for Christmas.

The player can use the money earned from trapping ghosts to choose how they want to upgrade their Proton Pack.

Besides voice acting, how involved are Bill Murray and the rest of the original cast?

Did they provide any input? Will Ray Parker Jr. be reprising his iconic theme song?

The original cast has been very involved. Dan Aykroyd and Harold Ramis in particular have been involved in every step of writing the story, creating the script, naming the new equipment and ensuring that everything works inside the *Ghostbusters* universe. Due to the superhuman efforts of John Melchior at Sierra, Mark Kaplan and Keith Hargrove at Sony Pictures, and Dan and Harold, we were also able to get Ernie Hudson, Annie Potts, William Atherton and the Murray brothers back on board.

And of course, the Ray Parker Jr. song will be back and untouched. It's an incredibly cool song, and now you can get just as tired of hearing it as you did in the '80s!

Apparently, Slimer plays a big part in the game. Will there be any explanation as to where he comes from and, for those not familiar with the animated series, how he became a member of the team?

Slimer helps to get the whole story started. His role is more of an evolution from the *Ghostbusters* movies than the animated series. We don't really delve much into his past or his family here: we're saving all that material for a televised Christmas special.

Are you limiting the source material to the movies, or will you be pulling in ideas from the popular *Real Ghostbusters* show as well? How will the game attract the younger generation, which is more used to the comical and watered-down animated versions of the characters, as well as keeping the flame alive for older fans of the series?

Real Ghostbusters and *Extreme Ghostbusters* have a very dedicated following and many excellent qualities. However, they also vary greatly from the original films, and everyone's intent from the outset was to recreate and further the original *Ghostbusters* experience – which is a balancing act in itself. So to try to incorporate material from the other series would have needlessly complicated things.

Nevertheless, we were equally motivated to create an excellent gameplay experience too. *Ghostbusters* just deserves that. We feel that if it's a compelling experience, it will easily appeal to players who might be a little younger than the fans who saw it in movie theatres when it was first released.

Actually, *Ghostbusters* is still recognised and loved by young children. That's the result of people in their mid-30s growing up with and loving *Ghostbusters*, and then sharing it with their own kids.

***Ghostbusters* was a drama/comedy full of genuine danger mixed with wit and satirical comedy. For the purposes of a game, are you trying to push for more drama or more comedy?**

We lean more to comedy and thrills. We constantly evaluate the game by asking, "Is this fun, funny or scary?" If the element in question doesn't fit that standard, we take it back to the drawing board.

Who ya gonna call?

Rick Moranis. If you can find him, tell him we miss him. **NAG**

CRY ME A RIVER...

WHEN I WALK THROUGH the NAG office every day*, I first encounter the "Main Man" – the editor of NAG (a cool but hairy guy). On his desk is a computer worthy of praise! A real beauty of a machine and he wouldn't have it any other way. In fact, he always makes sure that his machine is the fastest, biggest, brightest and loudest. Then, I walk past two of the reviewers' desks on my left. They both are hardware lovers. They obviously make sure that their machines look slower than the editor's machine (no need to attract the editor's attention), but their machines are in fact fuelled by kryptonite. The trick is to periodically slam one's fist onto the desk and complain how slow the PC is and beg the editor for his fabulous machine. On my right are the art guys and other freaks handling the makeup of the magazine. Naturally, their PCs are powerful enough to cope with the games we play and the magazine we put together each month.

Then I look left and right and greet the gorgeous women handling the PR side of things for NAG and rAge as well as the receptionist. It's fabulous to get the "Hello Len" from bombshells... Yes, that's how I roll. Their PCs are fairly okay machines. They only play *Solitaire*, so it's cool. I smile as I walk into my office and gently touch the 'on' button atop my Cooler Master Cosmos S chassis to turn on my Skulltrail. Listen to the purring hum of the fans as they gently caress the 32°C of warm air around my two heat sinks, hugging two perfect Intel Core 2 Extreme QX9775 CPUs and the beautiful pair of AMD/ATI 3870X2 GPUs... Yes, this is life and this is how I roll.

I hereby revoke the article written by Neo in last month's issue awarding some or other (slower than my QX9775) CPU an award.

POWER!

Are you with me?

Enjoy this issue guys and girls.

Len Nery
Hardware Manager

* "Every day" in Len Land corresponds roughly to once or twice a week in Earth time.

HARDWARE Q&A

HII, READ YOUR BRIEF about 'POWER' in the June 2006 issue of NAG and after reading the 'PC Benchmarks' article I thought I would drop an e-mail in your account. I know most of you are still die hard 'PC forever' fans. Do not worry, I was also. The last game I could successfully run on my laptop was UT2k4... I like my gaming... decided on a brand new 60GB PS3 and 32" HD LCD... you know that when you buy a game for PS3 it is going to run. At worst, some games might need a newer PS3 firmware update... The best part is that I know the PS3's planned lifespan is ten years, so for the next nine years I won't pay a cent for hardware upgrades...

Johannes Wilke

Thanks for your mail; I trust you have enjoyed the magazine thus far. The reason one buys a

notebook is for mobile computing. This is why notebooks were introduced to the market in the first place. As an added feature, manufacturers have added GPUs capable of playing games to help tide the time whilst waiting in a terminal or restaurant. It has and always will remain attached to the term 'mobile computing'. I also need to comment on your pricing:

PS3 = R6,000, HD 42" Plasma = R12,999 (bigger and cheaper than a 32" LCD), second controller = R450, keyboard = R700, mouse = R500, Webcam = R400. Your total is R21,049... Now you still need your games and they are not cheap! The comment about it lasting you ten years is simply not true. You need to ask yourself if you enjoy the high-end games currently available for the PSone. If you do, then yes, your PS3 will last.



MICROSOFT WINDOWS 7

HAVE YOU SEEN THE movie *Minority Report*? Remember the scene where Tom Cruise's character touched a 3D image with both hands and manipulated it around. Well, this technology will blow your mind! Microsoft will introduce us all to multi-touch technology with the release of its new OS. In the meantime, Albatron showcased a special driver at Computex that allows multi-touch for Vista on their new 22" LCD touch panel, and while it isn't fine tuned at this early stage, it works surprisingly well and certainly gives us a fabulous taste of the future.

BROKEN A PSP CASE LATELY?

FINALLY, A COMPANY IN SA that will replace your broken casing with a shiny new one as easy as open, remove, replace and click... Gone are the days where you either glued your casing together (often with disastrous consequences), or threw your favourite game away. NAG will feature a full review in the August 2008 issue. For more information, visit <http://www.umdcases.co.za>.

AMD/ATI + PHYSICS = PHYSX ON GPU

News from Computex (the IT show that took place in Taiwan during June) is that AMD/ATI cards will not only run PhysX, but will also support Intel's Havoc! Anyone said yum?

NEXT-GEN RADEON IS UPON US

More news from the AMD/ATI camp at Computex is that the Radeon 4850 and HD4870 cards will be available by the time you read this issue. Apparently, they're more than 100% faster than the RV670 and will handle antialiasing correctly and not via shaders.

A current PC that will play the latest games won't set you back R21,000. In fact, you will be able to get one for less than R10,000 including a few games. It will last you two years and all you would need to do is upgrade one or two components such as GPU and memory. This won't set you back more than 2K.

Please understand that, this is what most guys would do. However, I won't play a game on anything less than a Skulltrail... POWER! (Shouted in a Jeremy Clarkson voice)

Len

Remember, simply send your question or suggestion to len.nery@tidemedia.co.za with the subject heading 'Hardware Q&A' and your letter may be printed too.

ANATOMY OF A REVIEW

A quick guide to the NAG Hardware Reviews section



DROP YOUR ROCKS AND READ THIS BOX

SPEC-TACULAR: This is where your buddy hooks you up with the nfo, yo.

SCORE: Gold-star treatment, only the best for our hardware.

NAG AWARDS

DREAM MACHINE: We have a dream. That only the best hardware gets this hot chick, waving her derriere in the air like she just don't care.

HARDWARE: Ever wonder why it's called hardware? If something has this award, then someone got hard for the ware.



HARDWARE SCORING SYSTEM

Our hardware scoring system is based on the reviewer's expert opinion. The scale is from 1 to 5 with no fractional values. Each number has a specific meaning, described below. Most products will score 3 or 4, with the occasional 5 or 2, and almost never 1. Note that a high price alone can never lower a score below 3.

- 5 The stuff of Legends. Buy it while you can, we probably already have.
- 4 A good deal; worth it if you're shopping for one.
- 3 About what you'd expect, no problems. You might want to wait for it to go on sale.
- 2 This has some issues. You should probably shop around for something else if possible.
- 1 The stuff of Nightmares. You'll probably be sorry you got one, even if it was free.

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DREAM MACHINE

0 KAY, SO THIS SECTION may be a waste of time for those of you not following the true path of righteousness... There is no way in hell you may ever, ever compare a PS3 or a [censored] Xbox to a Dream Machine! I received a letter from a reader stating that he had sold his laptop (yes, his laptop) to buy a console and he is enjoying his console more than he ever had his... come, let's all say it together...

"Laptop." Take a guess at how old his laptop was. Two years!

Buddy, look below my dribble text. Do you see the pretty pictures of the hardware? Does it look anything like your laptop?

I guess there is only one thing left to say. If you are a [censored] console fanboy, go read some other page. Welcome to the drool section....



PROCESSOR

Intel Core 2 Extreme QX9650
Intel Corporation [011] 806-4530



KEYBOARD

Enermax Aurora
Frontosa [011] 466-0038



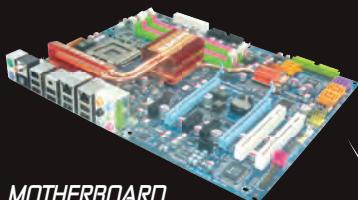
MONITOR

Acer AL2623W 26" Widescreen LCD
AXIZ [011] 237-7000



COOLING

Zalman Reserator XT
Frontosa [011] 466-0038



MOTHERBOARD

GIGABYTE GA-X48T-DQ6
GIGABYTE [011] 203-1000



GRAPHICS CARD

XFX GeForce 9800GX2 Black Edition
Computers Only [011] 312-3230



MEMORY

Corsair XMS3 CM3 X1024-1066C7
Frontosa [011] 466-0038



CASE

Cooler Master Cosmos S
Sonic Informed [011] 314-5800



POWER SUPPLY

Silverstone Strider 1000W-ST1000
Aleet Distribution [011] 888-8916/26



STORAGE

WD Caviar SE16
Drive Control [011] 201-8927



SOUND

ASUS Xonar D2
Axiz [011] 237-7000



[BFG Tech]



1 GB GDDR3



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GRAPHICS CARD

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Hardwired



by Neo Sibeko

Trappings of the Upgrade Cycle

THREE'S A VERY FINE line between being smart about computer upgrades and not being smart. If that didn't make much sense, keep reading. By the time you read this, the AMD/ATI 4800- and NVIDIA GT200-based graphics cards will have been released. Sure, these graphics cards are much faster than the graphics cards they replace.

While it was a given that the newer graphics cards would be faster, how much faster they would be was unknown. If you are the owner of a 9800GX2 and use a 22-inch LCD for your gaming, chances are that whatever graphics card is released will not allow you to use a higher resolution. If anything, you can apply a higher level of antialiasing. However, if you are already playing at 1,680 x 1,050 with 4x AA enabled, a higher sampling isn't going to provide you with better-looking visuals. This is especially relevant for those who don't overclock their system components. For the enthusiast, there may be a very real and compelling reason why the move to a newer graphics card is necessary. Cooling is much easier with a single GPU, and in competitive benchmarking, a single GPU means that you can enter every competition (which is not the case with dual-GPU, single-connector graphics cards).

Besides graphics cards, the other mistake that we make is buying the most expensive CPU money can buy at the time, or rather the most expensive CPU we are able to afford. It's not that the money could be better spent elsewhere, it's that for the money you spend there's absolutely no difference in gameplay. Even if you spend a vast amount of time number crunching or video encoding, the purchase of a QX9650 instead of a 9550 isn't sensible, because the difference between the two is a few seconds at most.

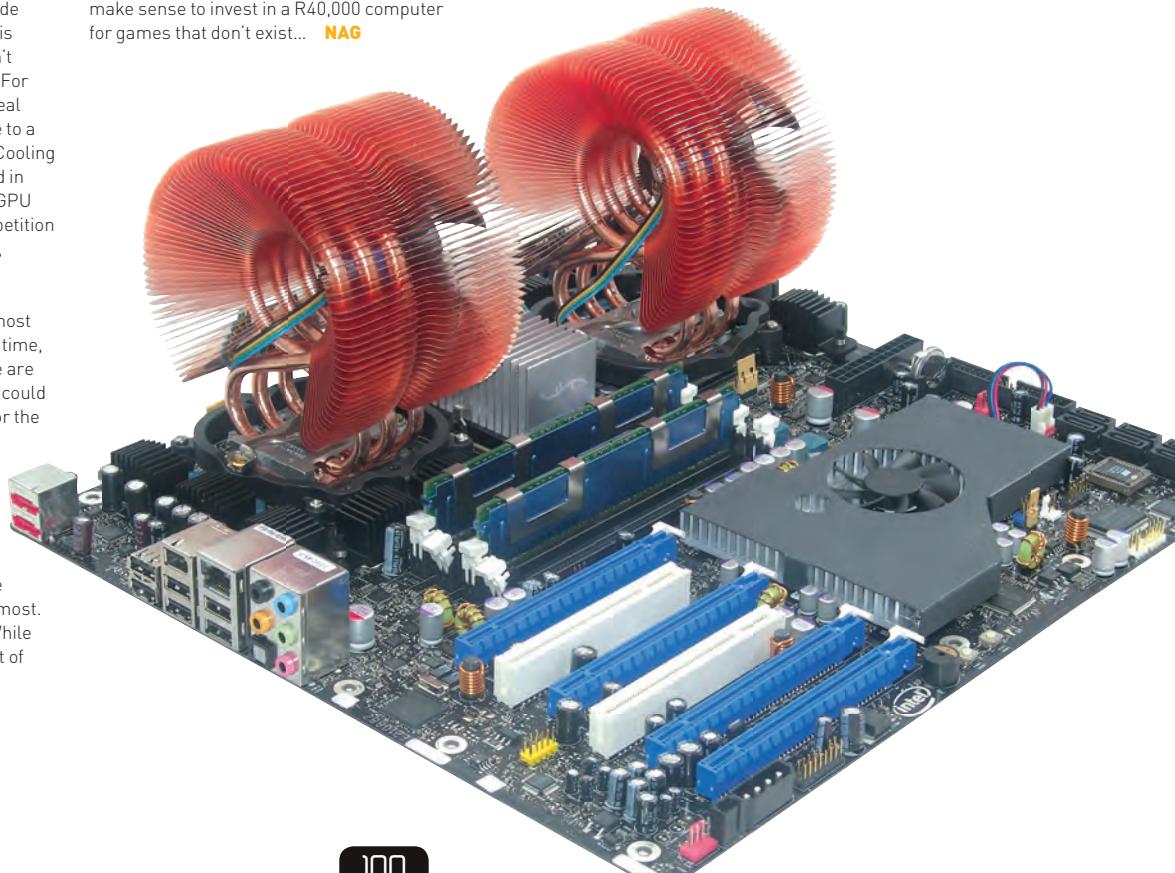
With RAM, the same holds true. While 2GB may be considered a fair amount of

RAM, we should all be looking towards 4GB of RAM. The amount of RAM is increasingly becoming more important than the speed of the RAM and most certainly the timings, which play less of a role as caches increase.

One must always be able to justify the price of the components bought in terms of the performance they provide. Even if you're an enthusiast, chances are that you spend more time actually using the computer than benchmarking. Many enthusiasts end up leaving the benchmarking scene or the competitive overclocking scene because it seems that hardware is growing ever more expensive.

For enthusiasts, the best and latest hardware will always provide better scores. This isn't the case for gamers. It doesn't make sense to invest in a R40,000 computer for games that don't exist... **NAG**

It doesn't make sense to invest in a R40,000 computer for games that don't exist...



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Website → www.bfgtech.com | Brand → BFG

In this feature we ask the question, "Do you feel lucky punk, well do ya?" Upgrading your beloved computer shouldn't be a gamble, it should be clear cut. Unfortunately, due to an uncertain future, it could very easily be murky waters full of sharks. Here we give you three scenarios to choose from.



THAT IS

A



A FEW YEARS BACK, WE got hold of, tested and were impressed by the revolutionary AGEIA PhysX card. However, back then, not enough games supported it, and not enough developers were committing to it. There wasn't a lot wrong with the technology.

With the price of PhysX cards coming down, we've asked ourselves the question, "Can a dedicated PPU really be considered a rational upgrade over, say, a second GPU to take advantage of the SLI capabilities of your motherboard or just a more powerful primary GPU?"

To find out, BFG supplied us with its PhysX card, a pair of 8800 GT 512MB graphics cards and one midrange 9600 GT.

Since physics must certainly be classed as an alternative in the AGEIA "triangle of gaming performance," traditional synthetic

benchmarks would mean nothing here. So, Ubisoft's GRAW 2 and, naturally, UT3 would get us the results we need.

Kicking off with a single 8800 GT-equipped test rig, we set some baselines. Our test rig consisted of an Intel 9300 quad-core CPU, and 2GB of standard-fare OCZ 1,066MHz DDR3 on an XFX 790SLI Ultra motherboard. UT3 ran at 1,600 x 1,200, max details and in DX10, in four bot-matches as per the HardwareOC benchmark tool, while GRAW 2 test runs consisted of a single run of the first mission at a resolution of 1,280 x 960.

The baseline, single 8800 GT-equipped test rig returned average frame rates in the four UT3 maps tested in the region of 51fps. Easily playable frame counts already, but not good enough of course. In GRAW 2, the

single 8800 GT averaged 85fps, but there were noticeable moments of slowdown.

With two BFG 8800 GTs installed and SLI enabled, we could see the difference in the GRAW 2 gameplay (which isn't backed up by FRAPS). At these low resolutions, the SLI overheads were minimal. You really need a resolution of 1,600 x 1,200 at to get a meaningful performance. UT3 was faster straight away, although a jump from 67fps to 73fps isn't exactly doubling up.

The 9600 GT fared very well, considering that it costs about the same as an 8800. Although it was slightly outperformed by the single 8800 GT and two 8800 GTs in SLI, you can up the latest-gen post-processing effects with the 9600 GT in place and be less affected. In GRAW 2, this midrange card's performance placed it between the

NOT FOR THE ANSWER THE QUESTION



two 8800-based setups.

We ran the PhysX card in the 8800 GT SLI rig, the fastest graphics setup in this test, to see how accelerating physics processing would affect overall performance.

Perhaps "accelerating physics processing" isn't the right way to describe this. "Enabling" would be a better word, as the presence of a PhysX card allows you to turn on extreme levels of particles and cause-and-effect chains of force that forever influence how you see and play the game. GRAW 2, like GRAW before it, is much more immersive with the PhysX setting on Extreme, but the performance also suffers.

UT3 only supports PhysX in a specially downloadable mod pack featuring two all-new PhysX-enhanced maps. The mod pack turns UT3 into something akin to CellFactor,

except more polished, complete and fun.

With NVIDIA now the driving force behind physics, more and more games are certain to start supporting AGEIA's PhysX. In fact, the GPU maker is touting impressive plans for the physics platform, utilising spare capacity identified via real-time load balancing in a multi-GPU rig for carrying out the required PhysX calculations, rather than a standalone, dedicated card.

We actually have three unique solutions here, for three unique preferences, rather than a clear-cut final answer. If you're looking for outright frame rates and only play games at a minimum of 1,600 x 1,200, then the 8800 GT SLI setup is your best bet. If you're on a budget, the 9600 GT offers great value, outperforming the 8800 GT as you turn

on pretty, modern rendering techniques.

If you want a bit of a novelty (for now), and are willing to pay for something that won't necessarily make your PC faster, but will enable it to do things it's never been able to do before, we still have to recommend the BFG PhysX card. After all, console gamers are willing to shell out over R1,000 for an FPS with a trick IR gun included, just for a different way of interacting with the game interface.

Playing with PhysX is a bit like that. It's so different from the convention that it's refreshing. In the end, you really need to make the call based on what games you play. If you play lots of PhysX-enabled titles, then it's worth getting the hardware. Even though it doesn't actually improve frame rates, it revolutionises the experience. **NAG**

GEFORCE 9800GX2: FIVE-WAY SHOOTOUT

THESE NO DENYING THAT the fastest graphics card you can buy right now is the GeForce 9800GX2.

We won't bore you with the technical specifications, as the 9800GX2 consists of two 8800GTS 512MB PCBs spliced together into a single package. Despite NVIDIA insisting that the total shader count of the 9800GX2 is 256 and everything else is doubled, it isn't that simple, as performance is never double what you would get with a single 8800GTS 512MB.

Since there is no doubt about which graphics card is the fastest, the question is, "Which version will take the speed-king crown?" All of the graphics cards in this shootout are more than capable of handling any game that can be thrown at them, and a purchase of any of these would guarantee stellar performance at very high resolutions.

We wanted to find out which card is the highest-performance card out of the box, which one has the most overclocking headroom and which has the best package over and above the standard DVI-to-VGA connector and driver disk. For testing we utilised the full 3DMark suite, starting with the enthusiast-favourite 3DMark2001 SE right through to the latest 3DMark Vantage. To add a gaming perspective, we used *Crysis* at a virtually unplayable 1,680 x 1,050 with 4x AA applied.



TEST RIG

CPU: Intel Core 2 Extreme X9650 @ 3.66GHz
Motherboard: GIGABYTE EP45-DS5 (Engineering Sample)
RAM: 2 x 1GB Corsair Dominator PC9136 DDR2
OS: Vista Home Premium SP1
Drivers: ForceWare Vista 175.16 WHQL

XFX BLACK EDITION

RRP: R6,999
Supplier: Computers Only
Website: www.computersonly.co.za
Brand: XFX

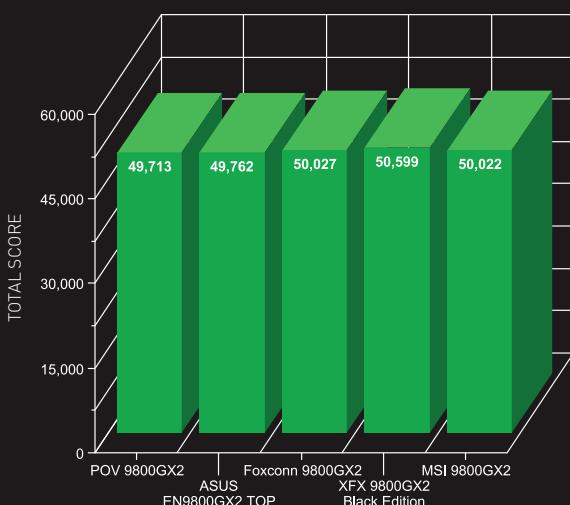
Reference: 700MHz; 1,700MHz;
Clocks: 1,050MHz

Package: Assassin's Creed

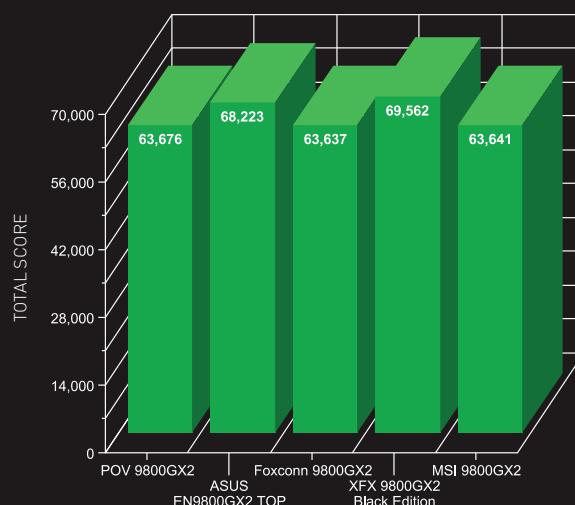
SCORE



3DMARK2001 SE



3DMARK03



The most influential test in this benchmark is without a doubt the Game Test 4 (Nature), which leans heavily on fill rate and available memory bandwidth. Because of this dependence on the texturing abilities of the graphics card, a high shader clock doesn't necessarily boost performance, but a core clock will see scores rise until the memory bandwidth becomes the bottleneck. The XFX Black Edition easily took the lead.

3DMark03 is almost completely ROP and memory bandwidth bound. The benchmark leans heavily on texturing ability, with Game Test 4 further testing the HSR abilities of the graphics card. The XFX Black Edition easily took the honours in this benchmark.



ASUS EN9800GX2 TOP

RRP: R6,599
Supplier: ASUS
Website: <http://za.asus.com>
Brand: ASUS

Reference 670MHz; 1,675MHz;
Clocks: 1,065MHz

Package: CD wallet, Company of
 Heroes: Opposing Fronts

SCORE



FOXCONN 9800GX2

RRP: R7,999
Supplier: Sahara
Website: www.sahara.co.za
Brand: Foxconn

Reference 600MHz; 1,500MHz;
Clocks: 1,000MHz

Package: Drive Clone 3, Virtual Drive

SCORE

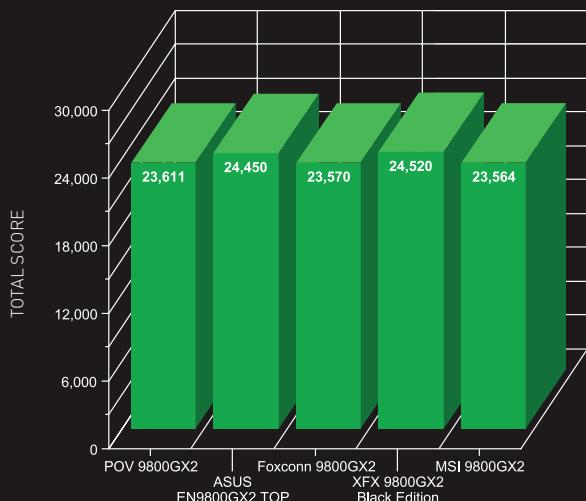


MAXIMUM CLOCKS

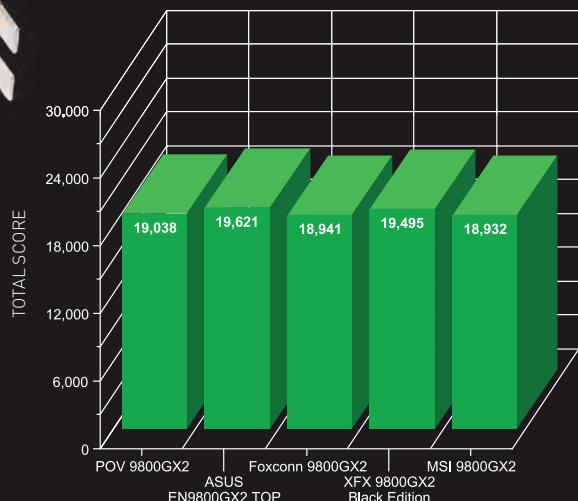
POV 9800GX2:	713MHz/1,782MHz/1,123MHz
XFX 9800GX2 BE:	771MHz/1,836MHz/1,101MHz
MSI 9800GX2:	738MHz/1,836MHz/1,098/1,123MHz
ASUS 9800GX2 TOP:	756MHz/1,890MHz/1,098MHz
Foxconn 9800GX2:	740MHz/1,836MHz/1,161MHz



3DMARK05



3DMARK06



3DMark05 - much as 3DMark2001 SE - is CPU bound, but offers component reliance and as such showed a smaller difference between the cards than 3DMark03. As before, the XFX Black Edition outperformed the other cards.

3DMark06 would be the most stressful test in the suite if it weren't for 3DMark Vantage. The scores may seem unusually high, but that's because of the CPU overclock. Without a doubt, if all of the cards in this shootout were to run 3DMark06 at the maximum stable overclock for each, the numbers would be above 20,000. An unusual result here: the ASUS TOP took top honours with a lead of more than 100 points.



POV 9800GX2

RRP: R8,000
Supplier: TVR
Website: www.tvr.co.za
Brand: Point Of View

Reference Clocks: 600MHz; 1,500MHz; 1,000MHz

Package: Assassin's Creed

SCORE



MSI 9800GX2

RRP: R6,899
Supplier: Pinnacle Micro
Website: www.pinnacle.co.za
Brand: MSI

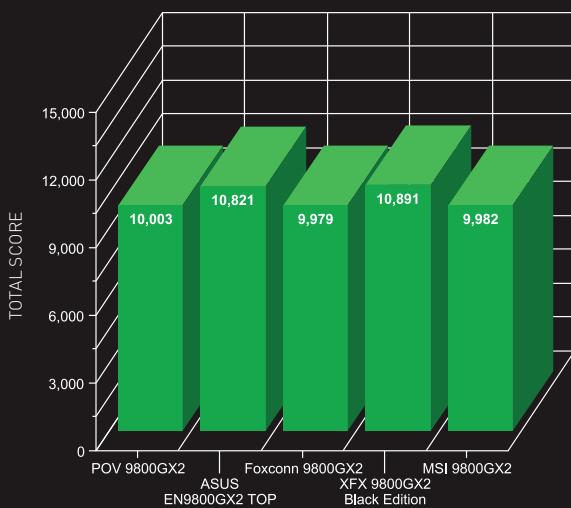
Reference Clocks: 600MHz; 1,500MHz; 1,000MHz

Package: HDMI cable

SCORE



3DMARK VANTAGE



The latest but not necessarily the greatest in the suite offers completely new tests that rely on DirectX 10 support both in the hardware and in the API. This benchmark is supposedly the most forward looking, and as a result it has the lowest results. Stream processor efficiency is king. The ASUS and the XFX models scored much higher than the others did. Once again, the nod had to go to the XFX Black Edition.

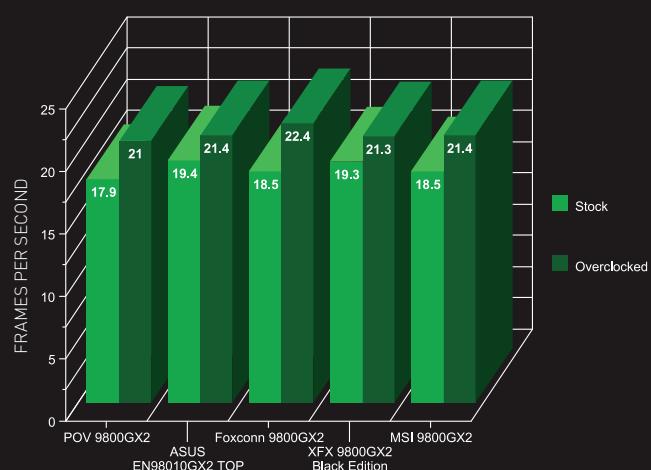
CONCLUSION

So there you have it, the XFX 9800GX2 Black Edition is the best 9800GX2 of the bunch. The margin by which it is better than the rest may not be large when viewed in percentage points, but it is important to know that the XFX and the ASUS are the two cards that will consistently give you reliable numbers. The MSI was the only card to crack the 22fps mark, but this is not a large enough margin of victory to warrant it being chosen over the others. The HDMI cable is great, but a copy of a current game would have been better. The speed-king crown has to go to the XFX 9800GX2 Black Edition. If you want unrivalled power, then this is the card for you. **NAG**

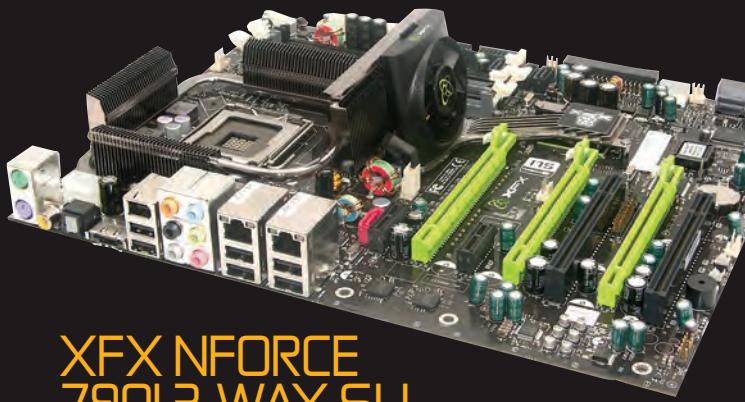
Neo Sibeko



CRYYSIS 1.2.1 (1,680 X 1,050 - 4X AA)



Antialiasing has always strained the memory sub-system and the *Crysis* results confirmed this. The most interesting results came from the XFX Black Edition, which is not only clocked higher than any other card, but also overclocks better than all the others. Despite this obvious advantage, *Crysis* performed the best on the Foxconn 9800GX2, which has the highest memory overclock of all the cards. The best setting for the graphics cards in this shootout is probably 1,680 x 1,050 with 2x AA enabled, or if your display can handle it, 1,920 x 1,200.



XFX NFORCE 790I 3-WAY SLI

XFX IS A COMPANY that knows who its customers are and what they want. The company's products are targeted squarely at the enthusiast.

The XFX nForce 790i 3-Way SLI is based on NVIDIA's newly announced nForce 790i chipset. This chipset is packed with enthusiast features, such as support for three-way SLI, courtesy of three PEG slots, each sporting a full PCI-E 16x lane.

The board's layout is very good, and

SPECS

CHIPSET	nForce 790i SLI Ultra
CPU SUPPORT	Intel Penryn, Core 2 Extreme, Core 2 Duo, Core 2 Quad
MEMORY SUPPORT	DDR3 1,600MHz (4 x DIMM slots)
EXTERNAL PORTS	4 x USB 2.0, 2 x Gigabit Ethernet, 3 x FireWire 400, 1 x eSATA, S/PDIF, Analogue audio
INTERNAL PORTS	6 x USB 2.0, 6 x SATA 3Gb/sec, 1 x PATA, 1 x FDD, 1 x eSATA
SLOTS	3 x PCI-E 16x, 2 x PCI-E 1x, 2 x PCI

SCORE



our test unit came with the optional fan attached to the vertical spars of the chipset heat sink – a good idea in our warm climate, knowing that this chipset can get a little warm. We liked the angular, titanium finish of the Northbridge/MOSFET cooler as well.

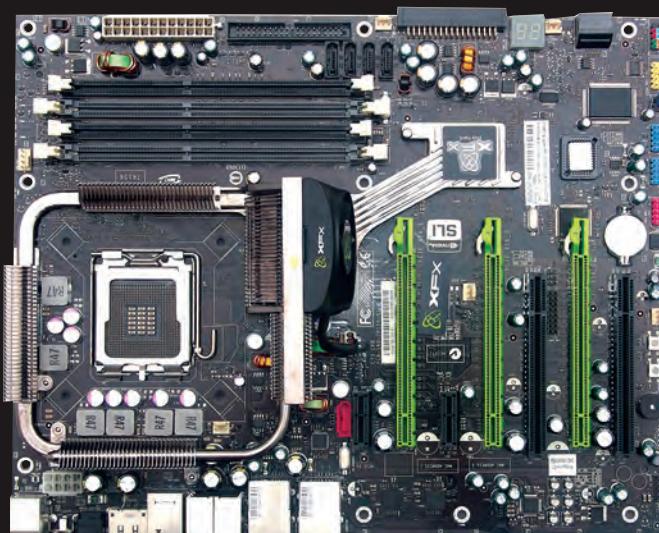
Jump into the BIOS, and there are many options to play with. Voltage tweaks are comprehensive to say the least. Using EPP 2 and the right RAM modules, you ought to be able to overclock the DDR3 sticks to 2GHz. However, the ability to unlink the FSB and DDR frequencies helped us with our fairly standard 1,066MHz OCZ DIMMs. Unlinked, and with just minor voltage boosts, our Q9300 CPU (clocked stock at 2.5GHz) managed 3,375MHz with the multiplier staying at the default 7.5x.

We dropped the multiplier to 6x, and the board booted and remained stable at 500MHz, but no more than that. Still, that's a pretty superb overclock, especially considering that at stock speeds this XFX outruns the X35 and X38 Intel Express chipsets – particularly in gaming applications – by quite a margin already.

We also appreciated the ample space between the DIMM slots, and the fact that the retention clips for the RAM modules won't obstruct longer graphics cards from being installed in the first PEG slot, even when these clips are left in the open position.

The XFX nForce 790i 3-Way SLI is the new king of the platform hill in our eyes... at least until an Intel Express answering salvo is fired. **NAG**

Russell Bennett



hardware

RRP → R4,399 | Supplier → Computersonly.co.za | Website → www.computersonly.co.za | Brand → XFX

RaZER™
mako™
2.1 Advanced Desktop Audio System

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The Razer Mako™ 2.1 bi-amplified multimedia speaker system is co-developed by the audio scientists of gaming audio leader Razer™ and audio industry pioneer THX Ltd. It is the first desktop speaker system to incorporate the THX Ground Plane™ and THX Slot Speaker™ technologies, as well as ClassHD™ Digital Amplifier Technology, which enable rich, omnidirectional audio effects that will redefine the desktop sound experience.



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- * Higher efficiency curves, improved SNR and EMI, and lowered distortion levels
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- * Downward-firing design with optimized acoustic enclosure
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- * 3.5mm auxiliary input minijack
- * 3.5mm headphone minijack
- * RCA audio input
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- * Total system power: 300W RMS

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COMMODORE GAMING PC

WHEN THE OPPORTUNITY TO test a R20,000 gaming PC arose, we asked ourselves the question whether R20,000 is worth spending on a rig that features mid-2007 components. However, don't dismiss this Commodore rig as an overpriced, out-of-date PC that's cashing in on the Commodore brand. There's much more to this machine than meets the eye, and if we were to look at the numbers alone, purchasing the Commodore would instantly transform your gaming experience.

A 3DMark Vantage score of 9,469 may not be impressive and neither is the 14,000 3DMark06 score. These numbers are disappointing when compared to the reference system, which features a single AMD/ATI Radeon HD3870X2. Despite the single card, the reference system scored just above 20,000 in 3DMark06. Even though these benchmark numbers cannot be disputed, they often don't reflect gaming performance. When playing *Crysis* on the Commodore system, it was vastly superior to the reference system. Whereas the reference system could hardly manage *Crysis* at more than 33fps at maximum graphics quality (DX10), the Commodore system managed well above 50fps with 4x AA applied at 1,280 x 1,024.

As for the PC itself, the Commodore comes with Vista Ultimate pre-installed, which is blisteringly fast thanks to the RAID configuration on the two primary hard drives and 4GB of first-grade PDP DDR2 RAM.

The best part about this PC is probably the outside and has nothing to do with number-crunching abilities. It may not be to everyone's taste, but Commodore has done a stellar job with the skinning of the case. The quality is to be commended

and other manufacturers would do well to learn from Commodore on how to truly create an inspiring case. We were informed that Commodore offers a service where a picture can be sent to them and they will design the skins ("C-Kins" as Commodore calls them) for the various panels of the case. These can then be shipped to you (obviously at a charge).

Over and above that, Commodore has gone the extra mile and included 50 of the most popular games that were on the various Commodore systems in the early '80s, such as *Summer Games*. Sadly, the included emulator for said games is only a trial version, which limits gameplay to five-minute periods.

As a high-end gaming system, the Commodore Gaming PC is without fault, and when you consider the components used, it's clear that to build a similar system would cost well above the asking price of this unit. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

SPECS

CPU	Intel Core 2 Extreme QX6850
RAM	2 x 2GB DDR2 PC8500
HARD DRIVES	2 x 150GB (RAID 0) plus 1 x 500GB
GRAPHICS CARDS	2 x GeForce 8800GTX 768MB

SCORE

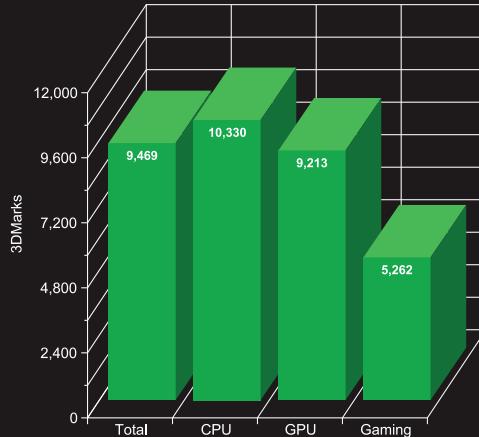


C-Kins can be bought from Commodore and applied to panels.

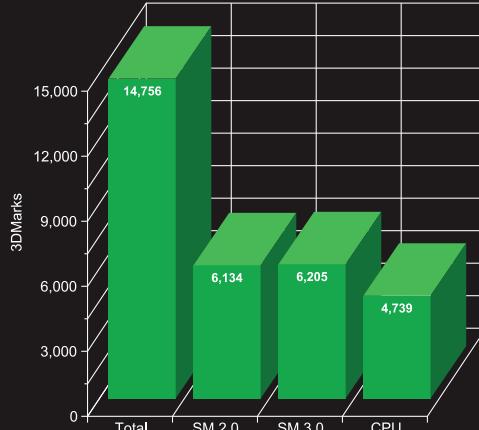


The 120mm fan is a necessity, as the 8800GTX cards get very hot.

3DMark Vantage 1.0



3DMark06





MSI P7N2 DIAMOND

THIS LATEST ENTHUSIAST-ORIENTATED MOTHERBOARD is equipped with absolutely everything the high-end power-user could desire: out-of-the-box support for four sticks of DDR3 running at 2,000MHz; support for all Intel LGA775 CPUs including the latest 45nm products; and second-generation PCI-E with enough lanes for four, full-speed 16x PEG slots for graphics cards.

That's in addition to three-way SLI compatibility, of course, primarily for using up to eight monitors.

While all of these are features common to the latest nForce chipset (although the quad-PEG slots are unique to MSI), the manufacturer has gone and added more to its flagship product. It has built a Creative Labs X-Fi Extreme audio card onto the motherboard, as conventional on-board audio solutions tend to lag under gaming whereas the X-Fi doesn't. The chipset is cooled via a new, optimised Circu-pipe arrangement, and MSI has employed next-gen solid-state capacitors from Japan, which, crucially, offer less

impedance at high voltages and high temperatures than even the solid caps we've become accustomed to.

As for the physical layout, the P7N2 is excellent. We really like the way in which the on-board SATA slots are now arranged in a little vertical 'tower' where the IDE connector usually sits, so even though long graphics cards might make access a touch tight, they won't block the connectors off completely. The always-appreciated soft-touch reset and power switches are there too for dedicated overclockers.

However, when you dig into the BIOS, things start seeming less attractive. For an enthusiast-level board, the P7N2 Diamond features a surprisingly limited BIOS feature set. You can't change voltages yourself, it seems, which is a huge tragedy if you're out to get the best from those caps. Moreover, if you don't want to use the automated overclocking "Core" system, you have to manually click your FSB up one MHz at a time to the desired setting rather than being able to type in a new frequency.

The automated overclock works fairly well, managing a 10% overclock - 250MHz - on our Q9300 test CPU (2.5GHz stock), and with the software utilities we were able to hit 3GHz quite comfortably. However, software overclocking tools have never been the most reliable, and so they proved again here with the software reporting one frequency and the BIOS, upon restarting, not reflecting the adjustments.

Still, the actual hardware potential of the P7N2 Diamond is substantial. The inclusion of quad-16x PEG slots is interesting for future developments, and the built-in X-Fi solution is well worth it. The latest chipset is more than a match for the X48 range in memory and bus performance, and we think that the 790 SLI is surely going to become a standard platform for high-end enthusiast machines. With a fixed BIOS, the MSI P7N2 Diamond could truly shine. For now though, let's just call it a diamond in the rough.

NAG

Russell Bennett

SPECS

CHIPSET	nForce 790i SLI Ultra
CPU SUPPORT	All LGA775 Intel CPUs
MEMORY SUPPORT	DDR3 1,600MHz (4 DIMMs)
EXTERNAL PORTS	4 x USB 2.0, 2 x Gigabit Ethernet, 3 x FireWire 400, 2 x eSATA
INTERNAL PORTS	6 x USB 2.0, 6 x SATA 3Gb/sec, 2 x PATA, 1 x FDD
SLOTS	4 x PCI-E 16x, 2 PCI-E 1x, 1 x PCI

SCORE



hardware

RRP → R3,599 | Supplier → MSI | Website → <http://global.msi.com.tw> | Brand → MSI

COMPRO
TECHNOLOGY



VideoMate Vista M3F

Universal analog TV/FM capture card

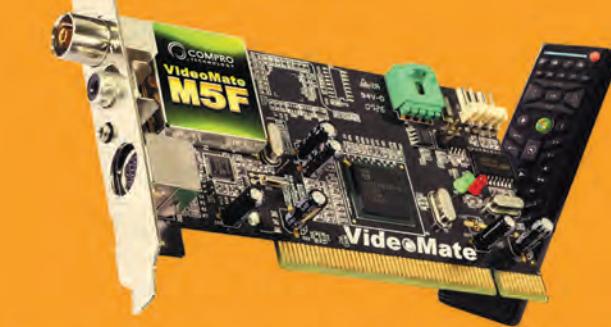
Bundles Windows Media Center remote
Supports S4/S3 mode Power Up Scheduled Recording



VideoMate Vista M5F

Universal analog TV/FM capture card

Bundles Windows Media Center remote
Compro exclusive S5/S4/S3 mode Power Up Scheduled Recording
Bundle software: Ulead MovieFactory



VideoMate Vista T500F

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CREATIVE HQ-1900 STEREO HEADPHONES

RRP → R749 | Supplier → Creative
 Website → www.creative.com
 Brand → Creative

IF YOU WANT HIGH-QUALITY headphones but are put off by the size of most DJ headsets, the HD-1900 set may be what you are looking for. The set represents a comfortable compromise between size, comfort and most importantly, audio fidelity. The product isn't perfect, but cannot be said to be a failure. If anything, most people will appreciate the flexibility of the ear cups, which can tilt along several axis. The cable is only 1.2m long, which is unusually short, especially considering that other DJ-class headsets from Creative have longer cables.

The neodymium driver is capable and sensitive. High frequencies are great and vocals come across with a fair degree of accuracy. Bass is adequate but lacks punch. That is to be expected especially when looking at the rated frequency response, which is good at the high end, but at 20Hz for the lower end, it cuts out much of the bass. Nevertheless, the HQ-1900 set still offers surprisingly good quality. Creative has done a stellar job with the HQ-1900. It may not be the best in any single discipline, but it does everything well enough for the headphones to stand out in a market filled with indistinguishable headsets. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko



A tilt mechanism allows the earpieces to rotate 90 degrees.

SPECS

DRIVER UNIT	30mm neodymium
WEIGHT	140g
IMPEDANCE	35Ω
CORD LENGTH	1.2m
FREQUENCY RANGE	20Hz to 20kHz

SCORE



CREATIVE EP-630 STEREO EARPHONES

RRP → R599 | Supplier → Creative
 Website → www.creative.com
 Brand → Creative

IN-EAR EARPHONES PRESENT A number of problems because of their size. However, with improving technology, audio quality has improved and the EP-630 is an example of a good earphone set.

The design is simple enough, with extended ends to allow the earphones to sit firm but comfortably in the ear. This works well for a while, but can get irritating after an hour or so as you'll struggle to find the optimum position. A slight change in angle can turn a great song into a disappointing experience. This will obviously depend on the listener's ears, but we found that with the phones pointed slightly to the front, they remained fixed and provided the same great bass as when they're pointed directly into the ear canal.

The most surprising aspect of this set is the impressive frequency range and sensitivity. Making use of small 9mm neodymium drivers, Creative claims a sensitivity of 106dB/mW and a brilliant 6Hz to 23kHz frequency response range, which is nothing short of fantastic. These numbers translate into a great listening experience as they really help in bringing the lower frequencies to life. If you're looking for earphones but are not particularly sure where to start, the EP-630 set is worth considering. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko



Rubber ends fit comfortably, but need to be positioned just right for the best audio quality.

SPECS

DRIVER UNIT	9mm neodymium
WEIGHT	9g
IMPEDANCE	16Ω
CORD LENGTH	1.2m
FREQUENCY RANGE	6Hz to 23kHz

SCORE



DIVOOM iTOUR-10 SPEAKER

RRP → R149 | Supplier → Comstar
 Website → www.comstar.co.za
 Brand → Divoom

IF YOU WANT TO listen to the music on your phone, iPod or just want better audio from your notebook without making use of a headset, the Divoom iTour-10 may be what you're looking for. It's in essence nothing but a portable speaker. However, the iTour-10 is more than a small portable speaker. What sets the iTour-10 apart from other portable speakers of similar design is the compatibility of the speaker.

With three attachments for Motorola, Nokia and Sony Ericsson phones, the speaker is compatible with a vast number of phones available. For those who want to use the speaker with more traditional music devices such as iPods, notebooks and the like, the unit sports a 3.5mm stereo mini-jack. This makes the iTour-10 pretty much compatible with anything out there. The battery is charged via USB, which takes about 2.5 hours for a full charge. While it's charging, the speaker can still be used for audio playback.

The iTour-10 is incredibly clear and relatively loud. It won't reproduce the bass you'll hear using headphones, but it's better than the majority of speakers built into most devices. With a battery that lasts for up to four hours, there are few units available locally that can match the iTour-10. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko



Speaker expands to deliver multi-directional audio.

SPECS

POWER	2.4W RMS
BATTERY LIFE	4 hours
DRIVER	Micro Metal
FREQUENCY RANGE	100Hz to 20kHz

SCORE



THRUSTMASTER UNIVERSAL CHALLENGE

RRP → R469 | Supplier → MobileG
Website → www.mobileg.co.za
Brand → Thrustmaster

THRUSTMASTER HAS REFRESHED ITS

Universal Challenge line-up of steering wheels to keep up with the times. The Universal Challenge is now compatible with the PS3, PS2, Wii, GameCube and PC, and it now also sports that hallowed Ferrari endorsement and a proud prancing horse on the steering boss, which has graced higher-end Thrustmaster kit.

They're only cosmetic touches, but the wheel does feel a lot nicer to hold now. There's no force-feedback of course, just a self-centring action that is quite pleasant, although compatible Wii and GameCube games do induce vibrations. The pedal set is without the aluminium pedals of more expensive Thrustmaster products, but does feel solid and grips the carpet well - a critical consideration on a qualifying lap.

It's fully programmable as well, so you can set up your controls precisely as you wish with just a little bit of patience. Once you get down to actually driving with the unit, well... it really does have a nice feel to it. It's very accurate and precise, while the self-centring springs manage to exert decent force but crucially still allow the



SPECS

PLATFORM COMPATIBILITY	PC, PS2, PS3, Gamecube, Wii
FEEDBACK	Passive, linear-resistance "bungee cord" self-centring
BUTTONS	Paddles for shifting, 8 remappable buttons, D-Pad, progressive pedal assembly
VIBRATION SUPPORT	PS2, Gamecube, Wii
ATTACHMENT MECHANICS	Central clamp

SCORP



wheel to twirl freely on its axis for very quick steering inputs.

Although Thrustmaster has products like its RGT Pro for dyed-in-the-wool enthusiasts, it's the volume-selling midrange that Thrustmaster must compete in to take the fight to the more established giants. And with offerings such as this Universal Challenge wheel to choose from, the brand name deserves to strengthen in the market. **NAG**

Russell Bennett

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Battlefield Reinvented? Chaos Studios - Frontlines: Fuel of War

THQ flew NAG to New York to meet with Kaos representatives and the Frontlines: Fuel of War team.

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Favourite Gaul warrior Asterix to appear on Nintendo DS soon

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RACE DRIVER GRID

Hi/Lo

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CHARTS AND PLAYLISTS

X-BOX 360 CHART

SELECT A REVIEW BELOW

1 # GRAND THEFT AUTO IV

2 # BLOODSHOT

3 # THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION

4 # CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE

5 # GUITAR HERO 3: LEGENDS OF ROCK

6 # MASS EFFECT

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8 # NEED FOR SPEED: PROSTREET

9 # JOURNEY TO PARADISE

10 # FORZA MOTORSPORT 2

CHART LEGEND

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GAMING NEWS

Hideo Kojima is a Guinness World Record Breaker! Featured in the Guinness World Records: Gamer's Edition 2008 are the achievements

GAMING OUT NOW

Ninja Gaiden II: Ninja Gaiden 2 makes its long-awaited debut on Xbox 360 as the blockbuster action-packed sequel to Ninja Gaiden.

GAMING COMING SOON

Rock Band Harmonix has added drums and a microphone to the established formula and allows your entire band to jam

VIDEO JUKEBOX

GAME TRAILERS

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1. RACE DRIVER GRID

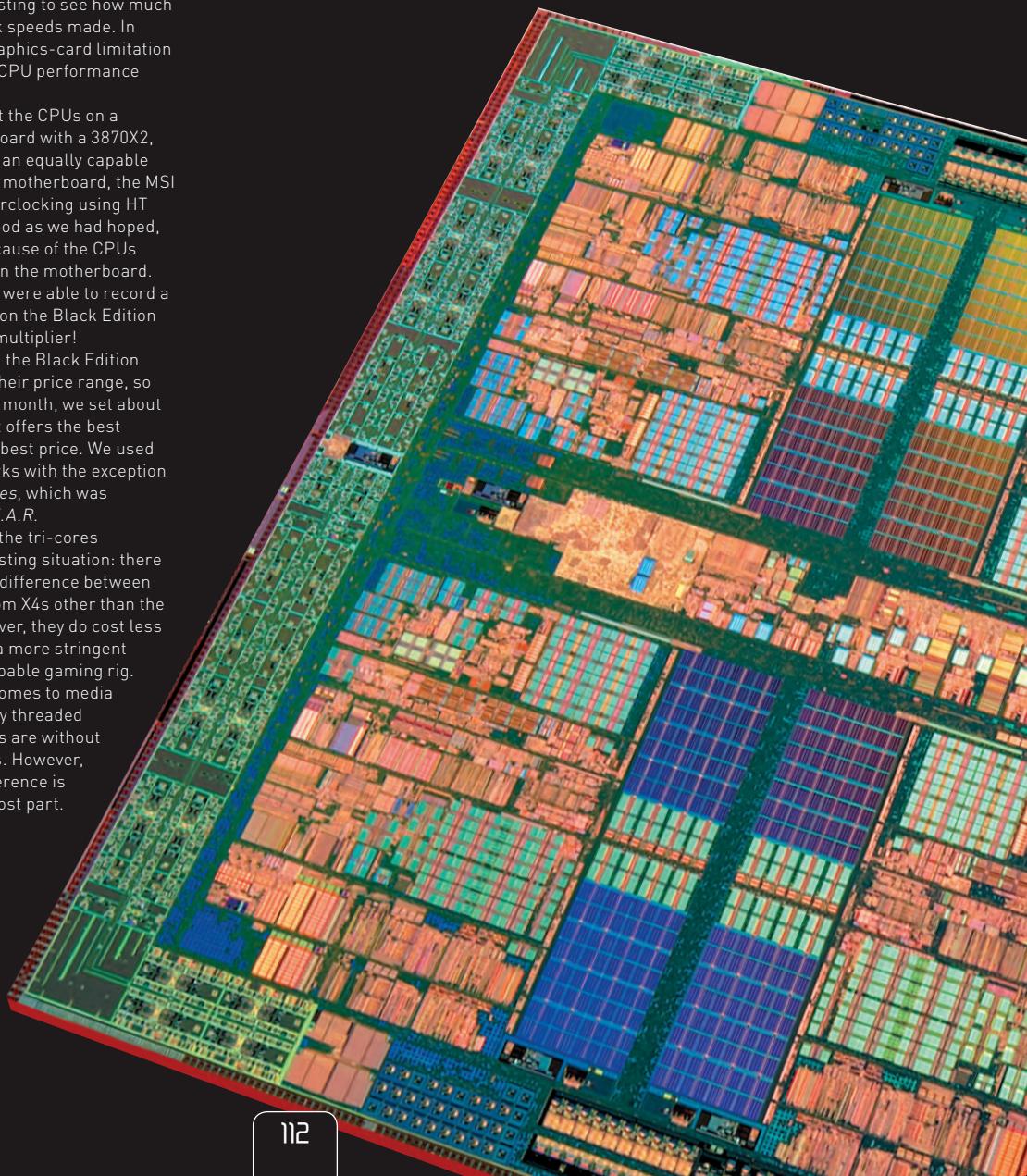
AMD CPU SHOOTOUT: PHENOM X3 VS. PHENOM X4

WE GATHERED SIX AMD CPUs and put them head to head. With a relatively small range in CPU clocks within the Phenom family, it was interesting to see how much of a difference clock speeds made. In situations where graphics-card limitation wasn't a factor, the CPU performance scaled very well.

We wanted to test the CPUs on a 790-based motherboard with a 3870X2, but had to settle for an equally capable NVIDIA 780a-based motherboard, the MSI K9N2 Diamond. Overclocking using HT speed was not as good as we had hoped, but that was not because of the CPUs but the early BIOS on the motherboard. Needless to say, we were able to record a 3.1GHz clock speed on the Black Edition CPU using just the multiplier!

For some people, the Black Edition CPU may be out of their price range, so as we had done last month, we set about finding the CPU that offers the best performance at the best price. We used the same benchmarks with the exception of *Company of Heroes*, which was substituted with *F.E.A.R.*

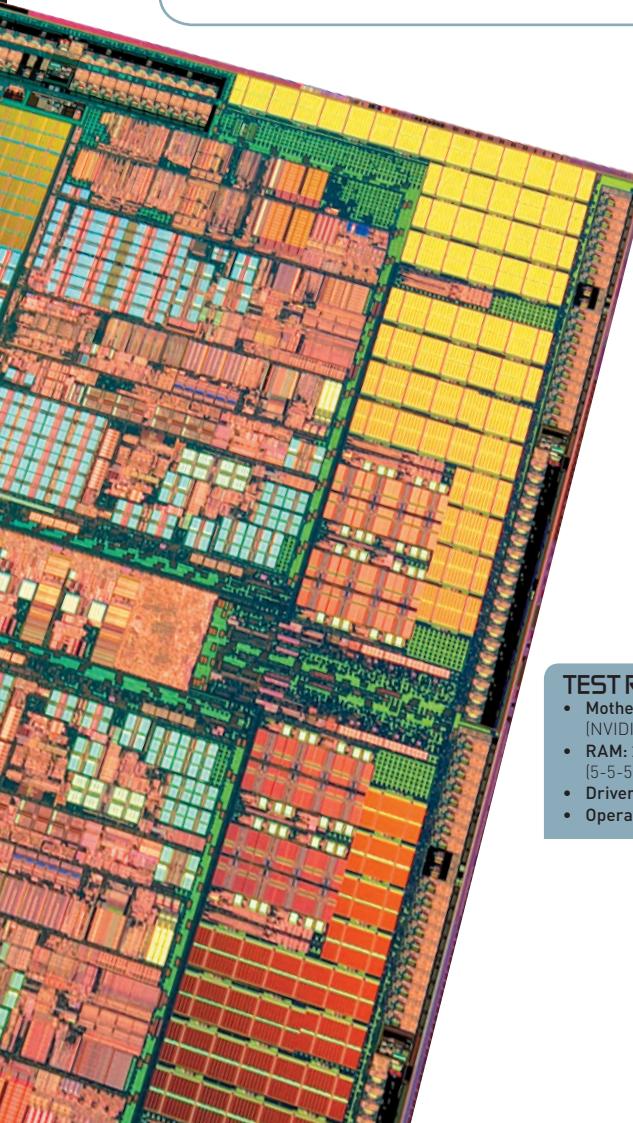
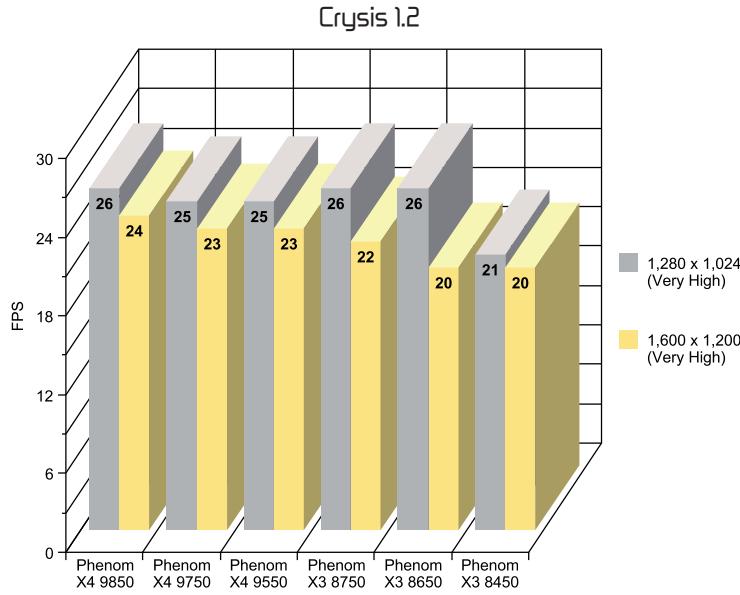
As for the CPUs, the tri-cores presented an interesting situation: there isn't a real tangible difference between them and the Phenom X4s other than the missing core. However, they do cost less and allow those on a more stringent budget to build a capable gaming rig. Obviously, when it comes to media encoding and heavily threaded applications, the X4s are without a doubt better CPUs. However, for gaming, the difference is negligible for the most part.



CRYYSIS:

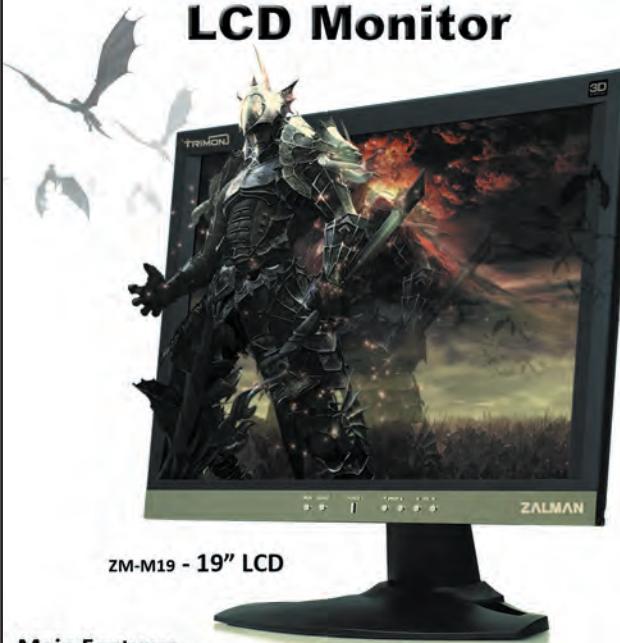
Crysis proved to be the most strenuous test with frame rates failing to reach the 30fps mark irrespective of the CPU used. While there was some scaling as the clock speeds increased, the difference between the highest and the lowest performing part was 6fps - which isn't much at all. The game is mostly

GPU bound, which is why the X3 8750 was able to match the 9850. Despite having patched the game to the latest version, it still only makes use of a single core (or two at most) with the remaining cores' load sitting at 7% or lower. Since the 8750 is the cheaper of the two processors, it's the winner here.

**TEST RIG**

- Motherboard: MSI K9N2 Diamond [NVIDIA 780a] DDR2
- RAM: 2GB Corsair Dominator PC9136 [5-5-5-15-2T]
- Driver: Catalyst Driver 8.4
- Operating System: Windows Vista SP1

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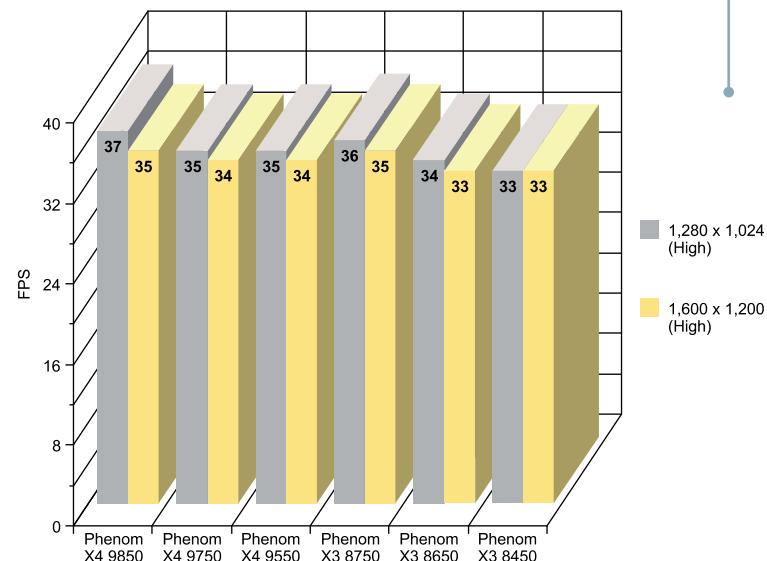
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WORLD IN CONFLICT:

This title features a DirectX 10 rendering mode, which is nothing short of spectacular. However, for the tests we made use of the DirectX 9 mode simply because it, unlike the former, is playable and isn't completely GPU bound. We expected a little more from the CPUs here than the numbers we ended up with, as none of the CPUs managed to break the 40fps mark. The performance of the 8450 was the worst. Even though it did manage just over 30fps at both resolutions, the game was not as smooth as it was with the other CPUs. Despite having the same clock speed as the X4 9750, the X3 8750 managed to outperform it by a hair's margin and took the honours.

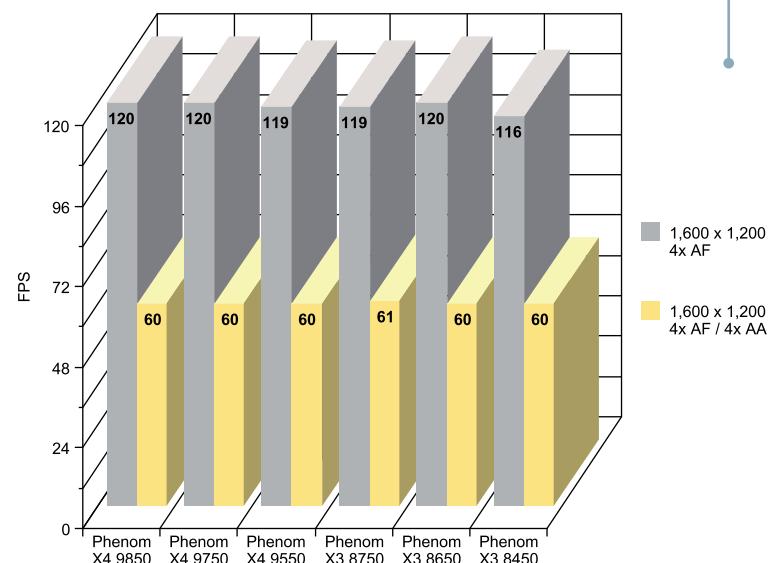
World in Conflict



F.E.A.R.

This game replaced *Company of Heroes* and the results are testament to its age. All the CPUs were more than capable of handling this game at fairly high settings. The in-game settings were maxed out with soft shadows and 4x AA enabled. With AA enabled, the frame rates dropped by half, but the CPUs still managed 60fps (which is more than enough for this game). If older games are what you predominantly play, then any of the Phenom CPUs will do. However, based on the results from the other two games, the 8750 would probably be the better CPU to buy.

F.E.A.R.



FOR THE OCERLOCKER:

In terms of bang for buck, the X3 8750 is the best CPU out of the six. However, for overclockers, the 9850 is easily the best. The price is relatively low when you consider that it's AMD's highest performing CPU and it's unlocked. Overclocking to 3.1GHz was easy and only needed 1.375V to stabilise using an air cooler. With more mature BIOS and better cooling, the clock speeds could have been in the 3.3GHz to 3.5GHz range.

CONCLUSION:

If you are looking to invest in an AMD platform purely for gaming, there's no doubt that the 8750 would be the CPU of choice. However, with the pricing of AMD's

current CPUs, the 9850 Black Edition is a worthwhile investment if you have some cash to spare. Besides having an extra core, it's 100MHz faster. If you want even more speed out of it, all you need to do is to change the multiplier from 12.5x to 13.5x without changing voltages or anything else. Today's games are not multi-threaded, so what one would be after is clock speed. Just in case anyone is wondering if the older Athlon X2 CPUs, such as the 6400+ Black Edition, would be better, the answer is no. The Phenom has a higher IPC than the older cores, so the clock speeds may be higher on the older CPUs, but the performance will likely be lower in some instances (even in single-threaded applications). **NAG**

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THE NAG GUIDE TO LIVING IT UP IN LIBERTY CITY: PART 1

So, we've been playing *GTA IV* for a month now, and because we don't have any of this rubbish 'real job' stuff to worry about, we've had more than enough time to sniff out all of Liberty City's dirty secrets. And by "dirty secrets," we really mean, "random dribble that we realised would conveniently cover two pages in this issue that we didn't know what else to do with."

ACHIEVE THIS

The Xbox 360 version of *GTA IV* has 50 shiny Achievement badges to dole out to the intrepid crook. While many of these are attainable simply through the completion of missions, here are 100%-guaranteed, NAG-tested strategies for completing some of the trickier objectives.

One-Man Army – Survive for five minutes on a six-star wanted rating

There are several 'somewhat' illegitimate ways to nab this achievement, but if you'd like to feel some sense of well-earned satisfaction when the notification pops up, try this instead:

- At the beginning of the game, before unlocking Algonquin, head down to the piers off Dukes Drive and liberate a speedboat. If you don't see any moored, try paddling around in the water for a moment. Turn around 180 degrees, and shazam! A speedboat will have magically appeared behind you when it thought you weren't looking. Approach from the side and board quickly [repeat this method until it actually works].
- Whiz around the area between Dukes and Algonquin, and at some point you'll cross the invisible border between 'Mostly Harmless' and 'Terrorist', bringing down all sorts of disgruntled authority upon your head. The real trick here is to weave a complicated slalom through the obstacles and vessels on the Humboldt River, thereby avoiding those annoying patrol boats and their nasty bullets.

Maintain this for five minutes, and 40 glimmering points will be yours for the gloating.

Walk Free – Ditch a four-star wanted rating

You'll grab this achievement during the course of the game anyway [the Three-Leaf Clover mission], but if you fancy trying your luck earlier or just getting in some practice for the real thing, you'll need a vehicle that handles like an internationally accredited dressage pony, but with all the durability of the finest German Panzer. NAG recommends a yellow taxi or squad car, as both are easily available.

- Roll on over to Francis International Airport on the east side of Dukes, and venture out onto the runway. You'll find yourself tagged immediately at four stars, with a colourful welcoming committee already en route to your position – time to test those driving skills.
- Try exiting the airport on the south side [that is, against the traffic flow], as this will make pursuit difficult. Drive on the far left or right of the lane and you'll find that you have just enough space to slither through without incurring some sort of unfortunate incident. Once you've reached the residential areas, keep turning corners to break the cops' line of sight.

Wheelie Rider – Pop a 500ft wheelie

This is one of the game's easiest achievements, if you know the best bike and the best spot to pull it off. And that's a Sanchez dirt bike and Francis International Airport's runway. You

can see the latter laid out in a V-shape on the Liberty City map, and it's worth noting that you need to run the length of only one section for the achievement. Of course, you'll be covered in trigger-happy police and N.O.O.S.E. agents by that point; so don't do anything silly or instantly regrettable like dying. To pop a wheelie, pull back on the left analogue stick to shift your weight to the rear of the bike, raising the front wheel.

Gobble, Gobble – Score three strikes in a row in the tenpin bowling mini-game

Bizarrely enough, this might just be the toughest achievement in the game, simply because the bowling is a bit crummy. Take the lane on the far left of the alley, and move two steps to the left before confirming your position. Aim as close to the centre as you can, make a wish, and roll her down.

Under the Radar – Fly under all the bridges that cross water

The only troublesome thing about this particular achievement is finding all the right bridges. Here's a hot tip:

- Start with Dukes Bay Bridge in the northeast, and wait for the message indicating that you've completed the first one.
- Immediately jump to your in-game city map, and you'll see all the other bridges marked with itty-bitty gold trophies. You can only see these during the two or three seconds following a successful fly-by, however. A quick trawl of the Internet seems to confirm that we're the only people who discovered this. NAG rules!

BROWSE THIS

GTA IV's in-game Internet is just like the real thing: full of unadulterated rubbish just waiting to waste your time! Incidentally, if you're having trouble finding those dammably elusive flying rats (or anything else, for that matter), check out www.whattheydontwantyouknow.com for some pointers. Other sites worth investigating:

- limevenus.blogspot.com;
- mail.eyefind.info;
- pychakilla.blogspot.com;
- www.americatravelguide.net;
- www.antfarmcam.net;
- www.area53site.com;
- www.arthrob.org;
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- www.freejames.org;
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- www.happyfarmersupplies.com;
- www.heritagenothate.org;
- www.homecremation.com;
- www.homeworkfriend.org;
- www.hornyhighschoolreunions.com;
- www.huganimals.com;
- www.ilovetoblowl.org;
- www.inyapaper.blogspot.com;
- www.krakea.com;
- www.leftover-vacations.com;
- www.libertatedwoman.blogspot.com;
- www.libertycitypolice.com;
- www.libertycityrealestate.net;
- www.libertytreeonline.com;
- www.liesdamlies.net;
- www.lipurgex.com;
- www.littlelacysurprisepageant.com;
- www.lootandwank.com;
- www.love-meet.net;
- www.loveyourmeat.com;
- www.moddertotallyrule.com;
- www.money2makemoney.com;
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- www.pinktorpedo.org;
- www.piswasser.com;
- www.pointclickshipabitch.com;
- www.poker-in-the-rear.com;
- www.publiclibertyonline.com;
- www.redwoodcigarettes.com;
- www.roidsforlittleboys.com;
- www.rustybrownsringdonuts.com;
- www.sh*tster.de;
- www.sprunksoda.com;
- www.stopshavingnow.net;
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- www.yourmexicandoctor.com; and
- www.yournewbabysname.com.

**DIAL THIS**

Using Niko's cellphone, you can do all sorts of cool stuff that totally breaks the game. Note that calling any of the following numbers will count towards the cheats listed in your stats, while using any of the health, weapon, and wanted numbers will permanently disable the Cleaned the Mean Streets achievement for Xbox 360 players (on that save profile, anyway). You can dial 911 at any time and with no penalty.

- Wanted level down – COP-555-0100;
- Wanted level up – COP-555-0150;
- Replenish weapons – GUN-555-0150;
- Replenish advanced weapons – GUN-555-0100;
- Restore health - DOC-555-0100;
- Restore all health and weapons - GTA-555-0100;
- Climate change - HOT-555-0100;
- Spawn NRG900 superbike - MBK-555-0100;
- Spawn Sanchez dirt bike - MBK-555-0150;
- Spawn Cognoscenti - CAR-555-0142;
- Spawn FBI Buffalo - CAR-555-0100;
- Spawn Turismo - CAR-555-0147;
- Spawn Comet - CAR-555-0175;
- Spawn SuperGT - CAR-555-0168;
- Spawn Jetmax speedboat - WET-555-0100; and
- Spawn Police Chopper - FLY-555-0100. **NAG**





THE WANTED



FILM ADAPTATIONS OF POPULAR comic book series are becoming increasingly common these days. With films such as *Spider-Man* grossing over \$500 million internationally, it's little wonder that Hollywood continues to churn them out. All the big names are involved these days, and it's become a rather large part of the industry.

Every now and then, however, lesser-known filmmakers get a chance to play with the big boys. Russian director, Timur Bekmambetov, the mastermind behind *Night Watch* and its long-awaited sequel *Day Watch*, is finally honing his English and stepping into the limelight. He's been handed a big wad of cash and access to some of the biggest names around, and is shortly set to release his first-ever American film.

Taking cues from the original comic, but otherwise freewheeling down the road of creativity, Timur and the gang will treat the viewer to scenes impressive enough to challenge the likes of *The Matrix* and *Pirates of the Caribbean*. Get ready for a tub full of visual pudding: hot, red sports cars zipping down dark streets, superhuman gun-slingers sending bullets along a path curvier than Angelina's hips, and some of the slickest-looking pistols you'll see this side of *BioShock*.

The story follows the rather dull life of one Mr Wesley Gibson (James McAvoy), a 25-year-old cubicle farmer, stuck in a dead-end job and too bored to do anything to change it. One fine day, Wes is approached by Fox (Angelina Jolie) and told the unfortunate news that his bad-guy-assassinating dad has taken one too many bullets to the head. Confused and a bit upset that his grey, boring life now has some colour in it, Wes joins Fox and sets off to meet up with Sloane (Morgan Freeman), leader of a super-secret order of assassins, known as The Fraternity.

"One must follow the will of the Loom

without question" is the code by which The Fraternity performs their deadly practice. The Loom has been smuggled through the ages, handing out prophecies to those willing (and able) to pay attention. It is Sloane's duty to decipher the binary code woven intricately into the fabric the Loom produces: small alterations in the regular patterns hold knowledge of hidden enemies or undiscovered allies.

The Fraternity exists to keep the balance in the world, and anyone who attempts to disrupt that balance promptly ends up with their name on a bullet. Not exactly rocket science, but the story promises twists and turns aplenty, as well as some interesting explorations of vengeance, power and corruption. Wes will grow from a snivelling wimp into a double-gunning powerhouse of revenge, determined to find and kill his father's murderers. Abilities beyond his wildest dreams are suddenly at his fingertips. Able to react faster than any member of The Fraternity, Wes gains

uncanny speed and agility, putting him firmly in the role of a superhuman.

Along for the ride is a host of interesting supporting characters. The Gunsmith, played by Hip-Hop artist Common, is the chap responsible for fitting out The Fraternity's very classy pistols with anything from laser sights to extended magazines. Customised weaponry is nothing new to the group, as each bullet destined to stop a heartbeat has ornate patterns etched into the casing, improving trajectory, speed and 'cool factor' exponentially. Playing the role of the bad guy is German-born Thomas Kretschmann, who plays the role of Cross, a ruthless sniper with an incessant desire to plant a bullet between Wes's eyes.

Whether or not film adaptations of comic books are your cup of tea, *Wanted* has all the right ingredients to appeal to those who enjoy a good action film: intrigue, eye candy, tons of weapons and generous helpings of freshly ground action scenes.





MOVIE NEWS

Smurfs Movie - We kid you not...

OPINIONS AT **NAC** are divided on whether the *Smurfs* were hot or not. Some have good memories from their childhoods and others said that blue wasn't their colour. We're guessing the general opinion out there is somewhat similar. Anyway, *Smurfs* fans, past and present can go singing and dancing through the streets because a live action, CGI hybrid (think *Alvin and the Chipmunks*) *Smurfs* movie is on the way. Apparently, J. David Stem and David N. Weiss (Shrek 2 and 3) have been contacted to write the screenplay with Sony Pictures Animation (*Open Season* and *Surf's Up*) dropping all the money. This will be the studio's first hybrid film and considering the commercial success of *Alvin and the Chipmunks*, Sony is confident about the film's potential. The history behind the *Smurfs* goes way back, but most people

will know them from the television show, which aired from 1981 to 1989. It's hard to say if this is going to be a huge success or a monster flop. We just thought it was interesting enough to end up here.



Jurassic Lark

WE'RE NOT GOING TO sit here and tell you that Hollywood is officially all out of ideas again... we promise (well, not for this issue anyway). Some of you might have played a game called *Turok* or one of its sequels, versions, etc. in the past. The basics of the game? It's an FPS featuring a beefcake-type hero with a bow and arrow who kills dinosaurs in a jungle. Perhaps now you can see why this might sound like a dream premise for a movie. We can just imagine how the pitch went: "It's like *Jurassic Park* meets *Rambo*." Adam Beach, who is linked to the project and recently finished voice work on an animated *Turok* movie (based on the 1954 *Turok* comic and not the games), recently told MTV, "We just finished the animated movie and now we're

going into the feature film movie [which should lens] hopefully in a couple years. We're about to set up meetings to develop a script and put it out there. I'll have to beef up, and be a good guy, and save the world!" It's not clear at this stage whether the proposed movie draws more from the comics, games or a little from both.



White men can jump!

JUMPER, REMEMBER THAT MOVIE? Some loved it and others hated it – a bit like the *Smurfs* really. In a recent interview, Hayden Christensen said that he was good to go on more *Jumper* movies. Although the movie showed great potential, it wasn't well received and disappointed at the box office. Originally, the *Jumper* concept was to be a trilogy if it did well. The books the movie was based on have plenty of additional content that would make more movies worthwhile. (If they fix all the problems and use the content.) It's reported that when the director, Doug Liman, originally started the movie, it was with a different cast, smaller budget and an alternative approach, but then Fox stepped in,

added more money and hired different actors. In terms of sequels, the director spoke about 'jumping' off the planet and even back in time. If Fox lets Doug Liman make the movie he originally wanted, and perhaps tighten up the production quality, then *Jumper 2* might actually be a decent bet.



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THE OTHER SIDE

Director: Gregg Bishop

Cast: Nathan Mobley, Jamie Alexander, Cory Rouse, Poncho Hodges, Chris Burns, Shale Nelson, Stephan Caudill, Daniel Massey

Genre: Action

Age restriction: 16 (V)

Run time: 92 minutes

Score: **★★★**

SAM NORTH'S DAY IS going great. Today's the day he is reunited with the girl he loves. Yeah, great day for him. Until he is murdered and awakes in 'the pit'. Just when things were starting to look up... Lucky for Sam, as he arrives in Hades, a group of Hell's residents are on their way out, trying to escape Lucifer's less-than-pleasant choice of property for his holiday resort down below. They escort Sam out of Hades, and back

to Earth, where Sam's memories of his death lead him on a quest to find his murderer(s). He also learns that his fiancé has gone missing, so he figures that he may as well look for her on the way. This won't be easy, however, as Lucifer naturally frowns upon his guests escaping from his 'Pleasure Palace', and sends three bounty hunters called "Reapers" to bring Sam and his newly acquainted friends back to 'the pit'. Make no mistake; *The Other Side* is pure B-grade horror cheese: cheesy action, cheesy acting, cheesy dialogue and cheesy special effects. It is also great in the way that only this level of cheese could make it. As you would expect, the movie is not pure brilliance, but if you're the type of person who's into this sort of flick, you'll eat it up. Special features include a few deleted scenes, a behind-the-scenes feature and a director's commentary.

Dane Remendes



12 HOURS TO LIVE

Director: George Mendeluk

Cast: Ione Skye, Kevin Durand, Brittney Wilson, Doug Abrahams

Genre: Thriller

Age Restriction: 10 (SV)

Age restriction: 89 minutes

Score: **★**

IF YOU BUY THIS DVD, turn it over and look at the credits at the back. Look closely. The credits consist of 'dummy text'. Now ask any graphic designer what dummy text is and he or she will tell you that when designing a document in InDesign or Quark, dummy text is used for layout purposes and is mock-up Latin. The dummy text is later replaced with the real text when available. It seems that someone at Ster Kinekor had a little slip-up and didn't replace the dummy text on the DVD sleeve. That's pretty much what you can expect from this flick – slip-ups, a weak plot, abysmal acting, a dumb blond who gets kidnapped in the first scene (as



opposed to the horror staple, 'The dumb blond who gets killed in the first scene'), a cute FBI agent out to get the guy who killed her partner/lover and who also happens to be the baddy who had kidnapped the dumb blond in the first scene, and rain... lots of it. We love rain and marshmallow men and clouds.

To summarise: weak plot, no attempt at acting at all, and rain. That's what this straight-from-TV-to-DVD flick is about. Nothing more. The DVD also features no interesting extra features. Now only if we had someone to translate dummy Latin to English...

Nati de Jager

JACKASS 2.5

Director: Jeff Tremaine

Cast: Johnny Knoxville, Bam Margera, Preston Lacy, Ryan Dunn, Dave England, Chris Pontius, Jason Acuña, Ehren McGhehey, Steve-O

Genre: Reality Comedy

Age restriction: 16 (VNL)

Run time: 65 minutes

Score: 0 stars

THE ORIGINAL JACKASSON MTV was always about the characters behaving badly and doing stupid stunts with the purpose of seeing how much pain they could inflict or withstand. Drinking milk until throwing up, riding shopping carts into walls or facing live crocodiles with raw meat hanging out of their pants was considered normal. They essentially did the kinds of things nobody would do – something of a community service to show kids around the world that arms do break and being stupid can get you killed. It was great television at the time. Then came a movie and a sequel and now we're left with a 2.5 DVD that



includes all the stuff that didn't end up in the movie – all sixty minutes of it. Considering the quality of the material up for grabs here, it's easy to see why it was left out in the first place; it's all just dead average stuff that is sometimes just too disgusting to laugh at. Although sixty minutes is a little scant for the money, there are some extras on the DVD, including a making

of, some bonus segments (even worse) and a making of the videogame. This uncut *Jackass 2.5* DVD is a total waste of money (and time) unless you have the entire collection of shows, movies, the action figures, the game and the T-shirt, and are the president of the Jackass fan club.

Michael James

THE CONDEMNED

Director: Scott Wiper

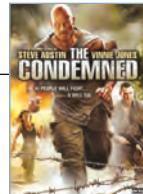
Cast: Steve Austin, Vinnie Jones, Robert Mamone, Victoria Musett, Manu Bennett, Madeleine West, Rick Hoffman

Genre: Action

Age restriction: 16 (LV)

Run time: 109 minutes

Score: **★★**



TEN OF THE MEANEST, most depraved convicts currently on death row in various prisons around the globe are snapped up by a wealthy television producer and dumped on a desolate island. The catch? There are explosives strapped to each of their ankles, set to go off in thirty hours, or if they are manually detonated by one of the 'contestants', unless one of these convicts can bludgeon, stab, shoot and generally hurt their fellow islanders until they are the last man or woman standing. Their reward? The victor will be freed and released back into society, thanks to a few under-the-table deals made by the producer. The over-the-top violence and mayhem that ensue is filmed using cameras, hidden all over the island, and is streamed live over the Internet, because no television network would ever endorse what is basically a snuff film. All of this is arranged by a crew headed by the producer mentioned earlier. That is the basic premise behind *The Condemned*. It's basically *Survivor*, but with convicts replacing your usual contestants. And with the contestants periodically voting one another off being replaced by the contestants periodically killing one another off. And with... Well, you get the idea. One strong theme in the film is the moral dilemma that creating this sort of thing would cause for the crew behind

the making of the show. After all, they're giving millions of people a viewpoint to watch murderers and rapists at work. While I was watching the film, I thought about how I wouldn't be surprised if 40 million people paid insane amounts of money to watch this sort of thing on the Internet if anyone ever endeavoured to make a show like this in reality. The actors do a decent job of playing out their roles in the film. "Stone Cold" Steve Austin plays Jack Conrad, one of the convicts chosen to 'star' in the show. How an American ended up in an El Salvadorian prison is explained as the movie plays out. Austin plays the role of the unwilling hero as you would expect him to: stern-faced, with an I-could-crush-you-with-my-thumb attitude. His dialogue is filled with the sort of one-liners and sarcastic quips this role was made for. Vinnie Jones is a former member of the SAS, a supposed badass who makes you want to hate him more with every despicable move he makes. When all the parts come together, this is a decidedly average action movie, though for some unexplainable reason, it remains an enjoyable film. There is nothing in the way of special features on the DVD, which is probably a good thing because I can't imagine how watching a 'making-of' for a film such as this would provide any enjoyment. *The Condemned* is not the absolute worst you could get when there seems to be nothing else to watch. Just don't watch it if you have a weak stomach.

Dane Remendes



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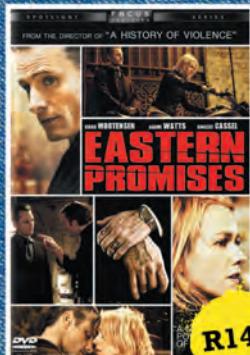
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SAW IV

Director: Darren Lynn Bousman
Cast: Tobin Bell, Scott Patterson, Betsy Russel, Costas Mandylor, Lyriq Bent
Genre: Horror
Age restriction: 16 (LV)
Run time: 92 minutes
Score: ★★

A WHILE BACK, I NOTICED *Saw IV* on a video store shelf and I remember thinking, "They've made another one!" After actually watching the movie for review, I can say that I'm glad I didn't spend the 20 bucks to rent it back then. The first *Saw* was a solid film with some original and unexpected twists, but the series hasn't progressed since. Instead, the powers-that-be have decided that they will continue to churn out sequel after sequel, with no real

change to the method aside from different torture scenes. The film is nothing you haven't seen before. Police/FBI/detective types attempt to piece together the puzzle that is Jigsaw's latest slew of supposedly justified maybe-murders. You may remember that he and his apprentice were looking a little under the weather (to say the least) the last time we saw them, so how Jigsaw manages to ply his trade despite his little problem is revealed as the film trudges on. *Saw IV* is the type of movie you'll only enjoy if you're into horrors/gore-fests and need your latest fix. This film is gruesome, arguably the most grisly of the series, so it's not recommended if you're feeling a little squeamish. *Saw IV* is not a horrible movie, but as part of a series, it doesn't add anything new. No special features on this DVD, and that includes the movie.

Dane Remendes



CLEANER

Directors: Renny Harlin
Cast: Samuel L. Jackson, Ed Harris, Eva Mendes
Genre: Drama
Age Restriction: 16 (LV)
Run time: 84 minutes
Score: ★★★

Have you ever considered what happens after a person has died in, say, a house? The body is disposed of by the appropriate authorities, but it is up to the residents to clean up the mess afterward. Most people don't really have the stomach for it. This is where former police officer Tom Carver (Jackson) comes in. He runs a rather special cleaning service, which specialises in crime scenes and the like. A cool and original premise, to be sure. Things get intriguing when, after doing a job at a particularly bloody and messy scene in an upmarket house, he subsequently discovers that the lady of that house (Mendes) has no knowledge of this job having been



required. Unfortunately, that is pretty much where the originality and intrigue end. From then on, this movie turns into a regular and utterly predictable drama, complete with corrupt cops and a beautiful woman who knows more than she was letting on. Jackson's performance is less over the top than usual: in fact, his portrayal of his character is quite



believable. The others are fairly unremarkable. The bonus features on this DVD consist of a series of deleted scenes. Overall, this is a rather lacklustre film. While it is not bad, it is certainly quite forgettable – a way to while away some time without challenging the brain.

Alex Jelagin

DISORDER

Director: Jack Thomas Smith
Cast: Darren Kendrick, Lauren Seikaly, Tom Ruderstaller, Allan Samulski, Sean Eager, Beth Benjamin
Genre: Horror
Age restriction: 16 (LV)
Run time: 99 minutes
Score: ★

A T FIRST, I WAS quite impressed to find a DVD at this price. Then the reason for it being so cheap became quite apparent. From the very get-go, the director tries to achieve an alienated, unsettling atmosphere and gets it right to a degree. Unfortunately, most of this movie's 99 minutes can best be described as tedious, with nothing much happening, and therefore a waste of time. If this is an attempt at building suspense, it fails dismally. I picked up a book and read thereafter while keeping an eye open for any 'interesting' scenes. The last 15 minutes or so invert this trend – I suppose in an attempt at 'frantic, tense action'. Instead, what we



end up with is a fairly ordinary slasher flick, and one that tries to be too clever. How so? Well, throughout the movie we are presented with conflicting information about the reality of something. It essentially makes the viewer wonder whether he or she is faced with a *Fight Club* sort of scenario. Unfortunately, at the end, the so-called twist comes in the form of a fast montage of completely



reinvented versions of previous scenes. So, instead of cleverly weaving together previously dropped clues, the end of the movie completely contradicts what has happened before. There are no bonus features included on the DVD, other than some trailers, which hardly qualify. Overall, this is one of the most abysmal offerings I have seen in a while.

Alex Jelagin

THE ASSASSINATION OF JESSE JAMES BY THE COWARD ROBERT FORD



Director: Andrew Dominik

Cast: Brad Pitt, Sam Shepard, Mary-Louise Parker, Dustin Bollinger, Casey Affleck

Genre: Western

Age restriction: 13 (VL)

Run time: 152 minutes

Score: ******

THE ASSASSINATION OF JESSE James by the Coward Robert Ford. There you have it, the name of this flick as well as a full plot description of it. Thrilling stuff indeed – you don't even have to watch this flick to figure out that the dastardly Robert Ford (played by Casey Affleck) will kill Jesse James (played by Brad Pitt) in the end. You also really don't have to read any further as everything you need to know about this flick is neatly summarised in one sentence (i.e. the name of the film). However, if you're into cloud formations, using clouds as an entertainment medium in your next home-grown masterpiece without reverting to expensive CGI, or are busy with your doctorate in clouds and the movement thereof, this film comes highly recommended (trust us, this is NAG after all).

When e-mailed for comment on this abysmal flick, Brad-boy responded that he was too busy selling the rights to the first photos of his and Angelina's soon-to-be-born twins to some 'well-researched, hugely popular' magazines (if you know what we mean – magazines unlike NAG!). The latest offer? \$25 million in American greenbacks.

Ange was also too busy to respond to our mails. After our editor had decided to

go to Paris to check out the African scenery (doesn't really make sense, does it?) and kill some Africans (see our *Far Cry 2* feature), Ange and Madge took it upon themselves, trawling slums and shantytowns in Kenya, looking for orphans to adopt. Well done Mr James for inflicting more misery on Africa! However, as they say, "TIA" – this is Africa!.

If you're looking for more information on Jesse James and his assassination, use Answers.com. You'll even be given information on why Jesse had become and outlaw, his life story and whether or not he had attended school. Again, gripping stuff and a must read.

Back to the flick – we won't mention the name again as it spoils the plot. In the 1880s, everyone knew Jesse James. Hunted by law officials in ten states, he was also one of the US's greatest heroes, lauded as a Robin Hood by the public. Robert Ford was an ambitious 19-year-old, unknown at the time. Befriending James, becoming obsessed with James and riding it rough with James's gang, his ultimate destiny was to kill James. And then there are the clouds, the magnificent clouds, the real starts in this flick. A shot of Jesse on a horse – two minutes of clouds. A shot of Jesse or someone else killing someone else – some more clouds. This flick would've scored zero weren't it for the clouds. NAG loves clouds and marshmallow men and zombies and FPS games and anything that's new. Clouds are lovely! See, we haven't included one plot spoiler in this review (apart from the name of this flick).

Nati de Jager



The coward



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ACROSS THE UNIVERSE

Director: Julie Taymore
Cast: Evan Rachel Wood, Jim Sturgess, Joe Anderson, Dana Fuchs, Martin Luther McCoy, T. V. Carpio
Genre: Musical
Age restriction: 16
Run time: 128 minutes
Score: *********

I AM NOT ONE WHO generally raves about musicals.

In fact, I rarely watch them, but *Across the Universe* is a gem that will certainly inject new life into musicals as we know them. The entire movie is based on Beatles music. Julie Taymore managed to take about 30 songs and weave a story around them. The result. Two hours of trippy awesomeness. The movie starts as a traditional musical, but once you are introduced to the key cast members, the roller-coaster ride begins. This musical is a love story set in the turbulent '60s. Jude (Jim Sturgess) and Lucy (Evan Rachel Wood) are the main love interest, while other characters such as Prudence hop in and out of the story. The most memorable, though, are the cameo appearances by Bono (Dr Robert), Eddie Izzard (Mr Kitel), Salma Hayek (a sexy nurse) and the legendary Joe Cocker. Most of the characters and plot fillers are derived from characters or stories in Beatles songs. (If you are a fan, you should be able to spot a few.)

From the moment the movie starts, with Jim Sturgess's rendition of *Girl*, you realise that the producers went through a lot of effort to refresh the Beatles' music without doing it any injustice. As each song played, I found myself turning up the volume on my home theatre system. All the actors sing in their own parts, and this oddly adds a lot of emotion to the film. *Across the Universe* cleverly uses music to tell most of the story.

The many choreographed scenes are also meticulously executed and successfully portray how the characters experience their relationships, the war and mind exploration. At



times, the movie feels like it was shot as a music video, which might not be to everyone's liking, but I think it works perfectly.

Across the Universe features clever dialogue with characters that express a lot of depth. The stories that the film tells will stick with me for

a long time, and I now have a new appreciation for the Beatles' music. If you want to watch a great musical, this is it. DVD bonus content: deleted scenes, short features, commentary and photo gallery.

Regardt van der Berg

SMALL TOWN FOLK

Director: Peter Stanley-Ward
Cast: Chris R. Wright, Dan Palmer, Warwick Davis, Howard Lew Lewis, Simon Stanley-Ward, Greg Martin, Hannah Flint
Genre: Horror
Age restriction: 16 (V)
Run time: 86 minutes
Score: *****

I LOVE INDIE AND LOW-BUDGET films, but it's a tricky genre to be a fan of, as there are only a few diamonds in the rough. *Small Town Folk* is a British low-budget film that takes place in fictional Grockleton. The inhabitants of this town are a little off their rocker. The 'Landlord' is the villain who, along with a number of henchmen, hunts down a bunch of people who trespassed on his land. The plot is a little weak and you will quickly spot the instances where an event doesn't make much sense. While it was obviously the director's intention to use a cheesy script with average actors, it would



have worked much better if he had combined those two with a little more panache.

This could've been a great low-budget film. The villains are great, but the heroes of the film need more personality. The cinematography is quite interesting and it mixes low-budget special effects with dated set techniques to give this movie a very



unique flavour. (Think *Devil's Rejects* meet *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* with a bit of *Hot Fuzz* thrown in.) This movie is obviously nowhere near as good as any of those titles, but it had the potential to be - at least as far as low-budget films are concerned. There are no extras on the DVD.

Regardt van der Berg

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JUMPER

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GENEXT #1

Format: Comic Series
Publisher: Marvel
Writer: Chris Claremont
Artist: Patrick Scherberger
Price: R26.50

GENEXT TELLS THE STORY of a new team of X-Men, in which the original members of the first two teams are all getting too old for the hero business. Writer, Chris Claremont, starts this, the first issue, by giving us a bit of a peek at the five new main characters' personalities, as they engage in a combat exercise with X-23, who is now a professor at the Charles Xavier School for Gifted Youngsters. He plans to reveal more about the team slowly - we'll get to know them better as the series progresses - and only drops little tidbits of information about them and who they are, which also helps with the idea of getting to know this new team over and above the hugely popular classic X-Men characters. This seems to be an entertaining new series in the X-Men line-up, and with a fresh story and new faces, it will hopefully develop into more than just another X-title, and have its own place in the market.

Clive Burmeister



HUNTRESS: YEAR ONE #1

Format: Comic Series
Publisher: DC
Writer: Ivory Madison
Artist: Cliff Richards
Price: R26.50

HUNTRESS: YEAR ONE TAKES a look at the origins of the Huntress, as have the other Year One titles of DC's other main characters before it. This is a great way to get up to speed on the characters if you have not been following any monthly series, and provides some unknown background for fans who have been collecting a title for a while, while still giving you an exciting story to follow. In this issue, we discover the tale of tragedy that started the life of Helena Bertinelli, and more about the family of assassins whom she grew up with and learnt her skills from. The book is nicely written and illustrated; blending its tenses of present and flashbacks from the past seamlessly, while it begins the tale of how Helena became the Huntress.

Clive Burmeister



BANNER

Format: Graphic Novel
Publisher: Marvel
Writer: Brian Azzarello
Artist: Richard Corben
Price: R129

THE CHUNKY, IRREVERENT ART style of Richard Corben lends itself well to an entirely out-of-place comedy, looking into the psyche of one Bruce Banner, a.k.a. The Hulk. Told from a much more ground-level point of view to bring about the real impact of what the Hulk does when Hulk smashes, *Banner* as a Hulk one-shot graphic novel is unlike any before it.

It's not all just introspection, although there remains a fair share of philosophising about what one would do if you were a walking bomb that explodes when not amused. It is almost a surprise just how much action is crammed into Coben's oversized panels and close-ups. The interaction between Banner/Hulk and everyone else remains free of the usual comic-book penchant for subtext.

Banner is a big departure from the comic-book norm, in both style and execution.

Miktar Dracon



CASEY BLUE: BEYOND TOMORROW #1

Format: Comic Series
Publisher: Wildstorm
Writer: B. Clay Moore
Artist: Carlo Barberi
Price: R26.50

IS CASEY BLUE JUST another ordinary girl, living an ordinary life, with an ordinary family? Well, if there's a comic about her, then probably not. But it all starts out that way, until one day she spaces out and wakes up, covered in someone else's blood, with no idea of what she did. Our first look at Casey suggests that she's more than human. But in what way? Well, that's still to be revealed. This new series from Wildstorm is an easy read, with nothing too deep and meaningful going on. But that's not necessarily a bad thing, although in this short look at some of the characters, they do seem a little plain and one-dimensional. But it's only the first issue, providing plenty of time for the characters to develop, and there are already some signs of a few interesting story hooks appearing in *Casey Blue: Beyond tomorrow*. The idea of some kind of super-human sleeper agent does appeal to me, but it's still too early to tell if that's how things will really turn out.

Clive Burmeister

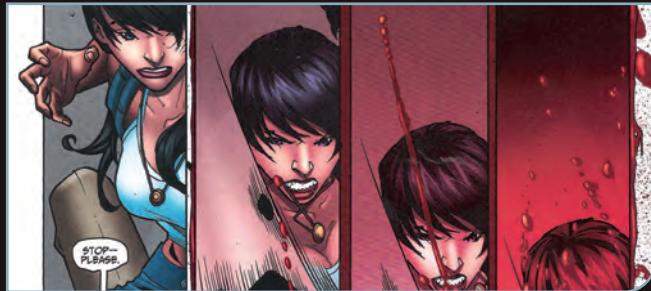


SNAKE WOMAN VOL. 1

Format: Graphic Novel
Publisher: Virgin Comics
Writer: Zeb Wells
Artist: Michael Gaydos
Price: R134.95

SHEKHAR KAPUR'S *SNAKE WOMAN* may be inspired by some of India's ancient and mystical battles between our natural and more carnal tendencies and our humanity and what is considered divine or enlightened. But that doesn't stop it from being an entertaining comic with a present-day feel to it that is only heightened by all the historical references it makes. This story of an innocent and somewhat nervous young woman, who is inherently an incarnation of a vengeful snake god bent on the destruction of those who once, lifetimes ago, eradicated her temple and her people, is expertly told, with enough twists and turns to keep the tale fluid and unpredictable. Michael Gaydos' artistic style pays much attention to the detail of emotion and the recognisable menace which the story's villains carry throughout time, which really add an element of plausibility to basic Eastern beliefs. *Snake Woman*, with its uniquely Indian inspirations, brings something new to the table.

Clive Burmeister



HEROBEAR AND THE KID: THE INHERITANCE

Format: Graphic Novel
Publisher: Astonish Comics
Writer: Mike Kunkel
Artist: Mike Kunkel
Price: R200

THREE IS INCREDIBLE PATHOS in starting a seemingly innocent story with a funeral, such as the one Tyler attends at the start of *Herobear and the Kid*. Having just lost his grandfather, Tyler struggles to understand himself, his new environment, the perils and pitfalls of school social dynamism and the fact that his only inheritance, a stuffed bear and a pocket watch, are far more than they seem.

Mike Kunkel is an established animator, having worked for The Walt Disney Studio on films such as *Tarzan* and *Hercules*. His credentials show clearly on the pages. His style of drawing as well as storytelling is fluid, engaging and full of life in ways that practically beg the reader to slow down and just enjoy.

This comic book feeds the imagination with its story and simple, black-and-white-and-red pages.

Miktar Dracon



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RRP: R735

Supplier: www.awx.co.za

A Square-Enix Japanese import! Produced by the Shinra Motor Company for use by the Soldier division, the Hardy DAYTONA is the ultimate vehicle from the *Final Fantasy* universe! This deluxe box set includes the Cloud Strife Play Arts Action Figure in addition to the motorcycle itself. Developed with the full cooperation of original character designer, Tetsuya Nomura, the DAYTONA is an incredible work of engineering, as no detail is missing from the bike: rotating tyres, movable steering and forks, and even working shocks! The cycle is approximately one foot long, and is perfectly in scale with the Cloud Action Figure (eight inches tall). You've waited for this set for ten years, and now it's finally a reality!



FUNNY KNIGHTS: RUDY

INTERNATIONAL EVENT VERSION (1/7 PVC STATUE)

RRP: R590

Supplier: www.awx.co.za

Shunya Yamashita's gorgeous illustrations of beautiful female subjects have entranced fans for years, and now fans can own magnificent sculptures of his works in pre-painted PVC form! Sculpted by modeller T (Ara Ara Komatta Dou), blue hair Rudy has an eye-grabbing pose and comes armed with her cool-looking blade and an optional bare chest piece. A display base is included to help keep her upright and safe. This is one gorgeous work of art that's not to be missed!

20th ANNIVERSARY METAL GEAR ULTRA DETAIL FIGURE SNAKE (MG54) OCTOCAMO FACE MASK VERSION

RRP: R209

Supplier: Cosmic Comics

Part of a series of five figurines, this particular rendition of Old Snake with his head covered in the Octocamo Face Mask also comes with a knife and a gun: the only tools required for taking down Liquid Ocelot and his bipedal moo-cow robots of destruction.



MARIO KART GACHAPON*

RRP: R35

Supplier: www.awx.co.za

Pull back to wind up. Watch them race away! As far as gaming merchandise goes, the *Mario Kart* DS racers' may be a little gimmicky (it's just a pull-back-and-let-go car with Nintendo characters), but it does exactly what it says on the plastic egg the racer comes in. The racer you get is random, so pray to the Lucky Packet deity before purchase. There are seven racers in total: Donkey Kong, Luigi, Mario, Wario, Peach, Bowser and Yoshi. The karts are little sturdy plastic toys and the racer head can be twisted a little to the sides for posing. We got Bowser and made him ramp over a Wii. For children three and up because you could choke on one of these.

*Gachapon, also referred to as "capsule toy," is a Japanese onomatopoeia, made up of two sounds: "gacha" for the turning of a crank on a toy vending machine, and "pon" for the sound of the toy capsule dropping into the receptacle. It is used to describe both the machines themselves, and any toy obtained from them. - [Wikipedia](http://en.wikipedia.org)



EL GRANDE

RRP → R526.00 (Inc. VAT and delivery)

Supplier → Boardgames.co.za

Contact → www.boardgames.co.za

Created by → Wolfgang Kramer and Richard Ulrich

Publisher → Rio Grande Games

Genre → Strategy Board Game

Age Restriction → All ages

IT IS REFRESHING TO see a board game that doesn't heavily lean on the element of chance. Other than chess, few can boast that. This decennial edition of the game (which was initially published in 1995) includes all four expansions that were subsequently released. One of these, "Intrigue & the King," in fact eliminates the random factor. The game is played in nine predefined rounds, although the rounds can take a varying amount of time, as it is all about making difficult decisions, and players may end up agonizing over their moves. There is a 'quick-game' option, which allows players to skip the three 'scoring rounds', and instead carry out all the scoring at the end of the game. *El Grande* is unusual in that players get to potentially exert their

influence on all territories, meaning that one player doesn't necessarily hold a single province or territory. Players face difficult choices: while the path to increase one's own score is generally fairly easy to see, it often pays to work toward hampering other players instead. The more players in the game, the more interesting it becomes: two-player matches are quite linear, while five-player games take longer and can be complex and intense. However, be warned: larger games can become quite political!

The manual is not intimidating in size, but is unfortunately somewhat ambiguous. The translation from German is very precise, but either some implied information has been lost, or the original draft skimmed over some concepts a bit. This means that the first couple of games will be spent trying to fill in occasional blanks in the rules. The game setup looks daunting at first, but this is due to the variety of game accessories. In reality, it doesn't take all that long. Games generally take between an hour and two hours, though with a full complement of five players, can take longer. **NAG**

Alex Jelagin



Bottom Line

A true strategy game that is not too complex to set up



PRINCE OF PERSIA

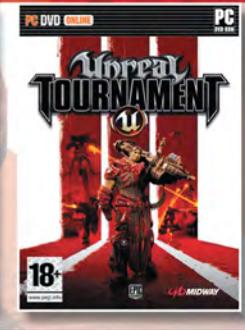


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